

UNDERSTANDING A COMPLEX WORLD: WHY AN EMPHASIS ON EMPATHY
COULD BETTER ENABLE ARMY LEADERS TO WIN

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General Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING A COMPLEX WORLD: WHY AN EMPHASIS ON EMPATHY COULD BETTER ENABLE ARMY LEADERS TO WIN, by MAJ Matthew J. Fontaine, 165 pages.

This study examines how empathy influences the execution of the Army mission command philosophy. This timely discussion of empathy partly reveals how leaders can be better prepared to win in a future operating environment shaped by the complexity and speed of human interactions. Through the analysis of case-studies involving General Stanley McChrystal and Colonel Michael Steele, this thesis describes how each individual's empathetic mindset resulted in both favorable and unfavorable mission outcomes for their respective organizations. The results of the analysis point to the surprising and important ways that a leader's capacity for empathy impacts everything from shared understanding, team-building, and even accepting risk. This study concludes with a recommendation for an increased emphasis on empathy development within the Army and a list of suggested topics for future research.

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ACRONYMS

AOC	Army Operating Concept
BDT	Behavioral Decision Theory
BPSM	Beyond People Skills Module
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COA	Course of Action
FSPM	Feedback, Study, and Practice Model
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JIATF	Joint Interagency Task Force
MDMP	Military Decision-making Process
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
O&I	Operations and Intelligence Brief
OE	Operational Environment
TF 714	Task Force 714
UFMCS	University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The environment the Army will operate in is unknown. The enemy is unknown, the location is unknown, and the coalitions involved are unknown. The problem we are focusing on is how to “win in a complex world.”¹

— GEN David Perkins, *Win in a Complex World*

This study examines how a leader’s empathetic mindset influences the execution of mission command within an organization. The “velocity and momentum of human interaction and events” is expected to have greater impacts on future land operations.² Actions or concepts that neglect the human aspects of war are unlikely to result in favorable outcomes.³ The military considers mission command as the most appropriate philosophy for the increasingly uncertain and complex future Operational Environment (OE) because it empowers subordinates to act and for its capacity to build trust within an organization.⁴ A leader’s ability to empathize reduces the likelihood that the human aspects of war will be neglected, but empathy is not discussed within the principles of mission command. Furthermore, civilian literature has revealed important empathy related concepts, not yet contained within doctrine, that have potential applications in regards to military operations. The purpose of this study is to explore this gap to support a recommendation for a greater emphasis on empathy development within the Army.

This chapter introduces the relationship between empathy and military operations. In order to do so, this chapter presents the context behind the study’s primary and subordinate research questions, definitions of key terms, and limitations and delimitations. This study’s primary research question is, would a greater Army emphasis on empathy development enhance the execution of mission command, and therefore

better enable leaders to win in the future complex OE? In chapter 2, five subordinate research questions are examined using the existing civilian literature and doctrine to gain a greater understanding of the primary research question. Each of the five subordinate research questions and their associated key terms are summarized here to provide context for the remainder of the study.

The first subordinate question is, what are the human aspects of the complex future OE? US experience in Afghanistan and Iraq has validated the timeless precept that, while science and technology will continue to influence war, war remains a political, human contest of wills marked by uncertainty.⁵ The degree of interaction among people and the speed at which information diffuses globally increases the consequences of military operations.⁶ Greater urbanization will result in an increasing number of military operations among populations, cities, and in complex terrain.⁷ Greater empathy will permit future leaders to better understand the human aspects of the future OE.

The second subordinate question is, what is empathy? The capacity for empathy is an important attribute for military personnel to possess.⁸ It is also a concept that has different meanings for different people and organizations. For the purpose of this study, empathy for the military professional is defined as the capacity to accurately understand the position of others, either past or present, by vicariously placing ourselves in their situation or taking their perspective for the aim of improving the execution of mission command now or in the future.⁹

The third subordinate question is, how does empathy influence the mission command philosophy? An ability to empathize influences the mission command philosophy in many ways. ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, defines mission command as

“the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.”¹⁰ The mission command philosophy requires leaders who can create shared understanding, build teams, and are able to anticipate the likely impacts of their actions. Leaders who possess a strong empathetic mindset are better able to understand the second and third order effects of their possible decisions. The ability to do so gives these leaders an advantage when executing mission command.

The fourth subordinate question is, what is the impact of empathy on military operations? The study of empathy, and its relation to military operations, is of vital importance. The 2020-2040 Army Operating Concept (AOC) states that the key to a “strategic win” in the future OE is to “present the enemy with multiple dilemmas.”¹¹ Understanding how a threat or the local population will respond to a dilemma is critical if the key to a strategic win is to present the enemy with multiple dilemmas. To win in a complex world, therefore, requires empathetic leaders who can understand what the enemy and local population value. Understanding the enemy and local population, however, is easier said than done.

The populations most often in need of our attention are often very dissimilar to our own.¹² This is especially true for Army personnel who routinely operate in distant countries with people who practice foreign cultures. As the number of differences believed to exist between two people increases, so, too, does what professor of psychology and philosophy, J. D. Trout, refers to as the “empathy gap.”¹³ The wider the empathy gap, the more difficult it is for one person to understand another.¹⁴ It is vital for

Army leaders to understand the psychology of empathy gaps. An empathy gap may lead to the dehumanization of enemy combatants or the local populace. It may also lead to the inability of a senior officer to take the perspective of their subordinates, peers, and superiors.

The fifth subordinate question is, what is the Army's current empathy development strategy? FM 6-22, *Leadership Development*, serves as the definitive army reference for judgement, problem solving, and adaptability. These are the characteristics that "allow leaders and teams to address the demands of complex, ambiguous, and chaotic environments of military operations."¹⁵ FM 6-22 provides specific guidance for improving one's ability to display empathy via the feedback, study, and practice model.

This study provides information useful to any leader or organization within the Army. It is not branch specific, and leaders at the tactical, operational, and even strategic level, can apply its inferences. The qualitative research method was used to arrive at this study's conclusion. Chapter 3 further outlines the methodology used in this study. In chapter 4, two case studies were developed and analyzed to determine the effects of empathy on mission outcomes. General Stanley McChrystal and Colonel Michael Steele were the subjects of the case studies. These two military leaders were selected due to their familiarity within the Army, and because the anticipated conditions of the future OE are similar to the environments they and their organizations operated in. In chapter 5, the analysis from chapter 4 was used to support the conclusion that the Army should increase its emphasis on empathy development. Chapter 5 also presents the Empathy in a Complex World flowchart (see figure 4), a model that combines Army doctrine and civilian literature to better explain empathy's role in military operations and outcomes.

There are no specific time limitations to this study. While the scope of this study is broad, certain delimitations were imposed so that research was feasible.

This study's focus is on the human dimension of mission command; it is not a study of mission command systems. This study does not determine how best to develop empathy, emphasize empathy development, or recommend any specific changes to current doctrine. This study does not demonstrate the relationship between a leader's lack of empathy and toxic leadership. This study does not cover the future of human cognitive development or systems and their possible impacts on mission command. This study does not explore human performance enhancing technologies. This study does not discuss emerging technology that may someday deploy in conjunction with leaders and Soldiers. This study does not explore any virtual or gaming tools that may someday increase the performance of leaders in complex and chaotic environments. In short, this study only demonstrates how empathy affects mission command to support the recommendation for a greater Army emphasis on empathy development.

Conclusion

This study recommends a greater Army emphasis on empathy development. An ability to empathize will be of critical importance in the complex human terrain of the future OE. Civilian literature has revealed important empathy-related concepts, which hold potential applications for military operations that are not adequately discussed in doctrine. These two points make this study both timely and significant. In the next chapter, the existing empathy-related doctrine will be reviewed in greater depth.

¹ US Army, US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet (TP) 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept (AOC): Win in a Complex World* (Fort Eustis, VA: Department of the Army, 2014), iii. Remarks by GEN David Perkins in the preface.

² Ibid., 11.

³ Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, “Continuity and Change: The Army Operating Concept and Clear Thinking About Future War,” *Military Review* 95, no. 2 (March-April 2015): 10.

⁴ Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2020* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2012), 4.

⁵ McMaster, 7.

⁶ US Army, TP 525-3-1, 11.

⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁸ US Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Leader Development* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 7-16.

⁹ This definition is an adaptation from the Merriam Webster, J. D. Trout, Zachary Shore, and FM 6-22 definitions. See chapter 2 of this study for a complete discussion and citation of these sources.

¹⁰ US Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-1.

¹¹ US Army, TP 525-3-1, iii.

¹² J. D. Trout, *Why Empathy Matters: the Science and Psychology of Better Judgment* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 23-26, 28-32.

¹³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ US Army, FM 6-22, 5-1.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.¹

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

This thesis will determine if a greater emphasis on empathy development would enhance the execution of mission command in order to better enable Army leaders to win in a future complex OE. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the existing military and civilian literature relating to the anticipated future OE, empathy, and mission command. To facilitate understanding of this topic, this review has been organized by the following subordinate research questions: what are the human aspects of the complex future OE; what is empathy; how does empathy influence the mission command philosophy; what is the impact of empathy on military operations; what is the Army's current empathy development strategy? Empathy is a uniquely human attribute. To understand the role of empathy and its relation to the execution of mission command, one must first examine the human aspects of the anticipated future OE.

The Human Aspects of the Complex Future OE

US experience in Afghanistan and Iraq has validated the timeless precept, that while science and technology will continue to influence war, war remains a political, human contest of wills marked by uncertainty.² The speed at which information diffuses globally and the degree of interaction among people increases the consequences of military operations.³ Greater urbanization will result in an increasing number of military

operations among populations, in cities, and in complex terrain.⁴ The primary source of doctrine for understanding the future OE is TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The US Army Operating Concept Win in a Complex World*. The AOC identifies five characteristics of the future OE likely to have a significant impact on Army operations. Table 1 lists the five characteristics and a selection of their associated human aspects.

Table 1. Five Characteristics of the Future OE	
Characteristics of the Future OE	Human Aspects
1. Increased velocity and momentum of human interaction and events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Diffusion of information via ubiquitous media amplifies the interaction between people -Access to information allows organizations to mobilize people and resources more easily -Disinformation and propaganda drives violence
2. Potential for overmatch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Adversaries invest in technologies to obtain an advantage over US Forces to achieve overmatch - US Forces anticipate enemy efforts to disrupt or adopt those capabilities
3. Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Extremist organizations seek weapons of mass destruction to incite civil wars and gain control in support of political objectives
4. Spread of advanced cyberspace and counter-space capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Enemies collaborate in space and cyberspace to influence tactical operations
5. Demographics and operations among populations, in cities, and in complex terrain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing urbanization trends require forces capable of operating in congested and restricted terrain - Adversaries will operate in complex terrain to avoid US advantages and influence larger populations

Source: US Army, US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet (TP) 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept (AOC): Win in a Complex World* (Fort Eustis, VA: Department of the Army, 2014), 11-12.

Preserving the US Army's status as the leading land power will depend in part on the ability of Army leaders to identify the threats, risks to mission accomplishment, and interests of populations. On land, complex interactions between adaptive enemies and the civilian populations reduce the advantages gained by technology.⁵ The increased velocity and momentum of human interaction and events has and will continue to have significant impacts on military operations.⁶ The adaptable and networked nature of threat networks has rendered the traditional command and control micromanaging approach ineffective for solving the challenges of the future OE.⁷ Leaders who lack empathy may struggle to develop a shared context, establish trust, and to foster the collaboration necessary to empower individuals to act under the philosophy of mission command. If mission command cannot be executed, an organization will be "quickly overwhelmed by the speed and exaggerated impact" of threats and trends.⁸ Alternatively, the shared context of an organization, one that dehumanizes enemy combatants or the local populace, may result in the achievement of short-term tactical results at the expense of the greater political objectives of the conflict. Operating in the anticipated OE will require leaders with the ability to display empathy.

Empathy Defined

The capacity for empathy is an important attribute for military personnel to possess.⁹ It is also a concept that has different meanings for different people and organizations. Understanding how doctrine defines empathy and how it is described in civilian literature is critical in determining if a greater emphasis on empathy development would be beneficial for Army leaders. How the Army views and defines empathy will be examined first.

While the Army touts mission command as a human solution towards solving complex operational challenges, the word empathy is used only a single time in the Army keystone mission command doctrine.¹⁰ In that instance, empathy is defined as the product of the sincere concern for a subordinate's welfare as it relates to a positive command.¹¹ Nor is empathy linked to mission command in FM 6-22, *Leader Development*, which identifies "displays empathy" as a component of the leader attribute of character.¹² FM 6-22 defines empathy as "the ability to share and understand someone else's feelings."¹³ FM 6-22 also lists the empathy strength and need indicators and the underlying causes of an inability to display empathy (see table 2). The indicators listed in table 2 will be used later in chapter 4 when analyzing how empathy or the lack of empathy has impacted specific military operations.

Table 2. Displays Empathy	
Strength Indicators	Need Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reads others' emotional cues -Considers others' points of view in decision-making -Shows compassion when others are distressed -Predicts how others will react to certain events -Demonstrates ability to establish good rapport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Shows a lack of concern for others' emotional distress -Displays an inability to take another's perspective -Maintains an egocentric viewpoint in decision-making process -Dehumanizes enemy combatants or local populace
Underlying Causes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Problems with or inability to take others' perspectives -Focuses solely on own needs without considering needs of others -Insensitive to emotional cues of others -Failure to identify with other individuals -Overly results focused 	

Source: US Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Leader Development* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2015), 7-17.

While doctrine provides a useful starting point, a review of the civilian literature is necessary in order to understand empathy's many facets.

Merriam-Webster defines empathy as “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner.”¹⁴ This definition is similar to the definition in FM 6-22, but expands on what is being understood—from just feelings to experiences as well.

Author J. D. Trout takes the distinction further, stating that empathy is “uniquely directed toward others” in contrast to sympathy which “is focused not on accurate understanding but on feeling.”¹⁵ For Trout, “empathy has a goal to accurately understand another's inner states by placing ourselves in his situation or taking his perspective.”¹⁶ Trout also introduces what he calls “empathy with a purpose.”¹⁷ Empathy with a purpose asks what concrete actions we should take in light of our empathetic understanding, an appealing idea for the action-oriented military professional.

For many, the goal of empathy is to mind-read in order to predict what another's likely actions will be.¹⁸ The potential predictive quality of empathy is alluded to in FM 6-22 where empathy is stated as enabling a leader to “understand how their actions will make others feel and react.”¹⁹ The “others,” in this instance, is any person to include Soldiers, civilians, the host-nation population, and enemy forces.²⁰ Author Zachary Shore explores the predictive nature of empathy, and coins the term “strategic empathy” in his work, *A Sense of the Enemy: The High-Stakes History of Reading Your Rival's Mind*.²¹ Shore defines strategic empathy as the ability of a person to “think like their opponent”

for the purpose of identifying what an enemy's future behavior will resemble.²² Shore posits that empathetic leaders can determine the measures an adversary is willing to employ by focusing their attention on the behaviors during periods he calls "pattern breaks."²³ Pattern break behaviors are defined simply as deviations from an adversary's routine.²⁴ In the future OE, characterized by an increase in the velocity and momentum of human interaction, it will be essential not just to identify how the enemy will act, but to examine how an action will affect all others in a given population.

An analysis of these descriptions of empathy reveal three different core aspects of the concept of empathy as it relates to military operations. The first core aspect is that empathy is about understanding, not feeling. The second aspect is that empathy should have a purpose. The third aspect is that often, the purpose of empathy for a military leader is to discern how any action will affect the future behavior of any person or population. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, empathy for the military professional is defined as the capacity to accurately understand the position of others, either past or present, by vicariously placing ourselves in their situation or taking their perspective for the aim of improving the execution of mission command now or in the future.²⁵ It is easier to define empathy than it is to execute military operations with an empathetic mindset. Understanding how empathy influences the mission command philosophy is examined next.

How Empathy Influences the Mission Command Philosophy

The military considers mission command as the most appropriate philosophy for the increasingly uncertain and complex future OE because it empowers subordinates to act and for its capacity to build trust within an organization.²⁶ ADRP 6-0 defines mission

command as “the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.”²⁷ The mission command philosophy “helps commanders counter the uncertainty of operations by reducing the amount of certainty needed to act.”²⁸ Mission command increases the agility and adaptability of an organization by decentralizing decision-making and granting subordinates’ significant freedom of action.²⁹ The mission command philosophy requires subordinate leaders who possess greater situational understanding and who are able to anticipate the likely impacts of their actions. Leaders at all operational levels therefore require the ability to display empathy.

The ability to empathize can influence the mission command philosophy in myriad ways. Commanders are guided by the following six principles when exercising mission command: build cohesive teams through mutual trust; create shared understanding; provide a clear commander’s intent; exercise disciplined initiative; use mission orders; and accept prudent risk.³⁰ Empathy influences all of the mission command principles but has the greatest impact on team building and the creation of shared understanding. Table 3 associates these mission command principles, less the use of mission orders, with the empathy strength and need indicators (see table 1) that have the greatest potential influence on an outcome when exercising mission command.

Table 3. The Influence of Empathy on the Principles of Mission Command		
Principle	Necessary Strength Indicators	Detrimental Need Indicators
Build cohesive teams through mutual trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reads others' emotional cues. -Considers others' points of view in decision-making -Shows compassion when others are distressed -Demonstrates ability to establish good rapport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Shows a lack of concern for others' emotional distress -Displays an inability to take another's perspective -Maintains an egocentric viewpoint in decision-making process
Create shared understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reads others' emotional cues. -Shows compassion when others are distressed -Predicts how others will react to certain events -Demonstrates ability to establish good rapport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Displays an inability to take another's perspective -Maintains an egocentric viewpoint in decision-making process -Dehumanizes enemy combatants or local populace
Provide a clear commander's intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Considers others' points of view in decision-making -Predicts how others will react to certain events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Displays an inability to take another's perspective -Maintains an egocentric viewpoint in decision-making process
Exercise disciplined initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Predicts how others will react to certain events -Reads others' emotional cues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Displays an inability to take another's perspective -Maintains an egocentric viewpoint in decision-making process
Accept Prudent Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Predicts how others will react to certain events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Displays an inability to take another's perspective

Source: Created by author, table adapted from US Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2012), 2-1; US Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Leader Development* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2015), 7-17.

The Impact of Empathy on Military Operations

The populations most often in need of our attention are often very dissimilar from our own.³¹ This is especially true for Army personnel who routinely operate in distant

countries and foreign cultures. Unfortunately, the depth of a person's empathetic understanding favors those most similar to them.³² A widely held belief in America is that the ultimate fate of people, because they have free will, results from their choices, not their circumstances.³³ This belief according to Trout reduces an American's empathetic understanding.³⁴ As the number of differences believed to exist between two people increase, so too, does what Trout refer to as the "empathy gap."³⁵ The wider the empathy gap, the more difficult it is for one person to understand another.³⁶ The cognitive rule of thumb employed when an empathy gap is encountered is to assume that others are like us, and that all people therefore desire the same things that we would if we were in their situation—empathy lends itself towards egocentrism.³⁷ The psychology of empathy gaps made headlines after two terrorists' attacks that left over 170 people dead in a 48-hour period.

On 13 November 2015, a horrific terrorist attack in Paris left over 120 people dead and over 350 people wounded.³⁸ People everywhere were sent into mourning with "many of the world's monuments illuminated in the blue, white and red of France's tricolor."³⁹ The day prior, Beirut was rocked by twin bombings that killed 43 and left another 230 wounded. Amid the global outpouring and cries for solidarity in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, the "people of Lebanon found themselves asking: 'where's our flag?' 'Where's our solidarity?'"⁴⁰ Many commentators claimed that racism and Western bias resulted in a muted international response.⁴¹ Others, like Stanford University psychologist Emma Seppälä, believe that while a bias had a part, an understanding of psychology is needed to explain why Americans react more strongly to one event than another.⁴² Like Trout, for Seppälä, the explanation in the different levels

of response can be attributed to an empathy gap.⁴³ French influences are more visible to Americans, and we can picture ourselves in Paris in contrast to Lebanon, a country that many Americans would struggle to locate on a map.⁴⁴ The result, Seppälä explains, is that “it’s natural for us to feel more compassion for disasters affecting people and places we feel similar to or familiar with, and for situations and victims we know more details about.”⁴⁵ The impacts of empathy gaps extend to military personnel as well.

Understanding the psychology of empathy gaps is vital for American military personnel. The empathy gap between an Army leader and a destitute Afghan for example, may reduce the likelihood of accurately understanding what the future behavior of a destitute Afghan man might resemble.⁴⁶ The American empathy gap may mislead us to blame the local population for insurgent activity or to hold innocent people responsible for bad outcomes, when the population had no other viable choices.⁴⁷ It can cause us to believe that what we consider to be a decent society is a universal ideal.⁴⁸ In the worst situation, the empathy gap may lead to the dehumanization of enemy combatants or the local populace, or to the inability of a senior officer to take the perspective of their subordinates and superiors alike. Another aspect of empathy that impacts military operations is what George Lowenstein of Carnegie Mellon University calls the “hot-to-cold” and “cold-to-hot” empathy gap.⁴⁹

According to Lowenstein, the emotional state or mood of a person influences virtually every aspect of human functioning to such an extent that we act almost like a different person depending on our current state.⁵⁰ According to Trout, people “think about the same event differently depending upon whether we are in a ‘hot’ state (angry, hungry, fearful, sexually aroused) or in a ‘cold’ state (composed, quiet, and reflective).”⁵¹

In a cold state (cold-to-hot empathy gap), a person struggles to envision how they or other people will feel or behave in a hot state.⁵² For Lowenstein, people in a hot state (hot-to-cold empathy gap) “tend to underappreciate the extent to which their preferences and behavioral inclinations are influenced by their affective state.”⁵³ The stresses of military operations are a near guarantee that American military personnel, adversaries, and the local population will find themselves operating in a hot state. Courses of action that are developed by leaders operating in a cold state, in secure and air-conditioned spaces for example, will tend to underestimate the motivational forces of hot states on future actions.⁵⁴

The result of this underestimation is that leaders fail to take measures to avoid situations or to design mitigation strategies for events that are engendered by such states.⁵⁵ Understanding the extent to which a person or population is affected by their emotional states or moods is critical to achieve the end state of a military operation. To not be aware of the cold-to-hot empathy gap is to invite tactical success at the expense of a strategic win.

The Second Battle of Fallujah began November of 2004. Prior to the battle, US commanders provided subordinate units “with a contradictory task: Take back the city with minimal US casualties, but leave it intact as possible.”⁵⁶ In the assault on the city, US commanders treated Fallujah “as a free-fire zone to try to reduce casualties among their own troops.”⁵⁷ At the battle’s conclusion, nine thousand homes in Fallujah were destroyed and thousands more damaged.⁵⁸ In the aftermath, US forces were accused of indiscriminately targeting civilians and officials were forced to admit that the incendiary chemical white phosphorus was used against insurgents during the fiercely fought

battle.⁵⁹ The cold-to-hot empathy gap partly explains how leaders could believe that the Second Battle of Fallujah could be won with the city left as intact as possible. In a cold state, the staff officers and commanders who planned the operation underestimated the aggressive measures that troops, with their lives on the line, would take in reclaiming the city while in a hot state. It is unlikely that the approved course of action for reclaiming Fallujah would have been deemed acceptable, or prudent in mission command parlance, if planners had estimated that over nine thousand buildings would be destroyed during the operation. In the end, senior commanders relied on troops on the ground to make impassioned decisions in an emotionally charged event.

People routinely make decisions that undermine their stated goals.⁶⁰ The cold-to-hot empathy gap contributes to our inability to imagine how a person, or even our self, will act in a given situation.⁶¹ Prescriptive theories of decision-making were developed in order to explore how people ought to make decisions (see table 4).⁶² Prescriptive theories “typically assume ideal circumstances (availability of information, awareness of options, abundance of time to deliberate, and so forth) in order to model the best and most rational path a person can take in order to come to the most suitable decision.”⁶³ The rational actor, one of several prescriptive theories, assumes that people select a best action according to stable preferences and constraints.⁶⁴ Behavioral Decision Theory (BDT), another prescriptive theory, seeks to clarify “the structure of complex choices by identifying the best course of action (COA) in light of the values that a decision maker holds.”⁶⁵

The Military Decision-making Process (MDMP) shares similarities with the BDT. An understanding of empathy informs us that decision-making models, such as MDMP,

have inherent limitations. An empathetic individual realizes that under stress or when dealing with people from vastly different cultures, that people make decisions that can hardly be considered rational. Those lacking this view may be predisposed to design courses of action that do not reflect the full-range of possible enemy actions. This is a critical point to better appreciate how shared understanding is achieved within an organization and when forecasting how subordinate leaders will take disciplined initiative during an operation. Prescriptive theories have limited real world applications because they do not take into account the effects that emotions, moods, or circumstances have on judgement.⁶⁶ The knowledge of how people make decisions in real-world situations is essential for an empathetic leader.

Table 4. Prescriptive Models	
Prescriptive Theory	Identifying Features of Each Prescriptive Theory
Rational Actor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Assumes that people desire more of a good rather than less of it -Individuals choose the best action according to unchanging and stable preference functions and constraints -These assumptions are often violated under real-world conditions
Behavioral Decision Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Choices are described in terms of 1) options, 2) outcomes, 3) values, and 4) uncertainties -These elements are synthesized in decision rules that enable choice among options -Decision Theory helps clarify the structure of complex choices by identifying the best COAs in light of the values that a decision maker holds.

Source: US Army, Mission Command Center of Excellence, *Cognitive Biases and Decision Making: A Literature Review and Discussion of Implications for the US Army* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: USA MC CoE), accessed 18 April 2016, http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/publications/HDCDTF_WhitePaper_Cognitive%20Biases%20and%20Decision%20Making_Final_2015_01_09_0.pdf, 10.

In contrast to prescriptive theories are descriptive models of decision making. Descriptive models are “designed to describe how people actually make decisions under real-world circumstances, regardless of their rationality.”⁶⁷ One descriptive theory is heuristics and biases (see table 5). Heuristics are mental shortcuts that “allow people to make quick and reasonably accurate decisions despite time constraints or limited information.”⁶⁸ Cognitive biases are the “predictable errors in judgement that they cause.”⁶⁹

According to author Donella Meadows, “it would be nice if the [Adam Smith’s] “invisible hand” of the market really did lead individuals to make decisions that add up to the good of the whole.”⁷⁰ “Unfortunately, the world presents us with multiple examples of people acting rationally in their short-term interest and producing aggregate results that nobody likes.”⁷¹ As an example, people burn inexpensive fossil fuels today that contribute to potentially calamitous and expensive climate change in the future. During counterinsurgency operations, commanders, frustrated by the lack of progress winning over the local population, maximize the use of airstrikes to kill insurgents and to protect their troops only to see the ranks of the insurgents swell during the next fighting season.

People make these decisions because of what Herbert Simon calls “bounded rationality.”⁷² According to Meadows, “bounded rationality means that people make quite reasonable decisions based on the information they have. But they don’t have perfect information, especially about more distant parts of a system.”⁷³ According to Simon and Meadows, people are not “omniscient, rational optimizers,” rather they are “blundering *satisficers* [original emphasis], attempting to (satisfy) our needs well enough (sufficiently) before moving on to the next decision.”⁷⁴ For Meadows, people do their

“best to further our nearby interest in a rational way” based on the information they know.⁷⁵ People do not know what “others are planning to do, until they do it.”⁷⁶ Contrary to the conclusions drawn by prescriptive theories, people do not find a “long-term optimum, we discover within our limited purview a choice we live with for now, and we stick to it, changing our behavior only when forced to.”⁷⁷ The concept of bounded rationality “provides an understanding of why” seemingly illogical behaviors arise.⁷⁸ The concept explains that what may seem like an irrational choice is reasonable “within the bounds of what a person . . . can see and know.”⁷⁹ Perhaps most importantly, “blaming an individual” for making a decision under the conditions of bounded rationality, “rarely helps create a more desirable outcome.”⁸⁰

In an effort to improve our judgement, people attempt to execute what Trout refers to as inside-strategies. An “inside strategy” is “a process of individual reflection, a little mental exercise, in which we try to reverse the effect of our biased reasoning.”⁸¹ The belief behind an inside strategy is you can eliminate the influences of your bias by sheer acts of will.⁸² Unfortunately, “the effects of cognitive bias are not simple mistakes, correctible to simple exposure to the facts,” rather they are “systematic, and the errors they produce are more like perceptual illusions than factual blunders.”⁸³ Knowing that a bias happens, or how it works, is not enough.⁸⁴ Future empathetic military leaders, armed with the insights provided by descriptive models, will go beyond inside strategies when designing approaches to achieve a desired end state and a clear commander’s intent.

Table 5. Heuristics and Biases	
Descriptive Theory	Identifying Features of Each Prescriptive Theory
Heuristics and Biases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Heuristics are rules of thumb used to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty -Highly economical and usually effective -However, heuristics can lead to biases and predictable errors

Source: US Army, Mission Command Center of Excellence, *Cognitive Biases and Decision Making: A Literature Review and Discussion of Implications for the US Army* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: USA MC CoE, 2015), accessed 16 April 2016, http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/publications/HDCDTF_WhitePaper_Cognitive%20Biases%20and%20Decision%20Making_Final_2015_01_09_0.pdf, 11.

According to Trout, “Outside strategies are designed to make it easy to do things that are good for us (such as exercise in public parks), and make it easy not to do things we shouldn’t (such as run up credit card debt).”⁸⁵ Trout regards outside strategies as the best “de-biasers” and problem solvers.⁸⁶ Outside strategies are routinely utilized in the Army, and with good reason. In contrast to the free-fire zone in Fallujah in 2004, rule of engagements and airstrike restrictions are two common outside strategies used by Army commanders.

An Army commander’s use of an outside strategy would seem to indicate a command and control approach to leadership as opposed to mission command. Indeed, it appears that utilizing an outside strategy is contrary to the very spirit of mission command. An outside strategy requires a more senior commander, further from the realities of the battlefield, to restrict the behavior of junior subordinates closest to the action. However, outside strategies have a place in the mission command philosophy under the principle of providing a clear commander’s intent. A clear commander’s intent

is a “clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state” that articulates the “overall reason for the operation so forces understand why it is being conducted.”⁸⁷ The commander’s intent, conveyed within a mission order, provides the commander an opportunity to incorporate outside strategies into a military operation without violating the mission command philosophy. Outside strategies are of particular necessity for military operations due to a psychological phenomenon called “priming.”⁸⁸

The exposure to certain environmental cues has the potential to unconsciously activate or “prime” a mental stereotype, which can influence the actions of an individual.⁸⁹ According to Trout, “some of our actions start before we consciously intend to perform them, and these intentions carry with them the illusion that the intention is causing the movement.”⁹⁰ The US Army has taken advantage of the effects of priming to influence the actions of its Soldiers.

As late as 2006, proponents of irregular wars “delegitimized” the enemies of Coalition Forces as simply “thugs, bandits, criminal tribes, bitter-enders, or fanatics.”⁹¹ Violent unit crests, mottos, cadences, and media are also environmental cues that may be priming Soldiers to make tactical decisions that result in poor strategic outcomes or dehumanize the local population. Army culture and training practices, designed to reduce the psychological resistance to killing, increase the likelihood that our ability to display empathy will be hampered. A strong resistance to killing another human being can be found in most psychologically healthy people.⁹² The marked absence of this resistance can be observed in sociopaths, “who, by definition, feel no empathy or remorse for their fellow human beings.”⁹³ The resistance to killing has been reduced in Soldiers via

conditioning and stress inoculation.⁹⁴ Basic conditioning techniques, such as the use of targets depicting real people as opposed to bull's-eye, are part of a “true revolution” in the manipulation that has better enabled Soldiers to kill.⁹⁵ In the anticipated future OE, a leader will have to “look through the eyes” of their subordinate and target populations for cues that may be priming behavior, which has the potential to undermine the accomplishment of the mission. With these insights, the leader will then design outside strategies that will automatically influence that selection of a desired behavior. Discovering the priming cues in a population will require cultural understanding.

While the concept of empathy is provided short shrift in doctrine, cultural understanding is discussed frequently. According to ADRP 5-0, commanders consider how US culture and the culture of others within an OE affect operations in order to build situational awareness.⁹⁶ Culture is defined as “the shared beliefs, values, norms, customs, behaviors, and artifacts members of a society use to cope with the world and each other.”⁹⁷ ADRP 5-0 goes on to state that “understanding the culture of a particular society or group within a society can significantly improve the force’s ability to accomplish the mission.”⁹⁸ The improvement is due to two reasons. The first reason is the improvement to situational understanding that accompanies the acknowledgement that one’s perceptions greatly influence how they understand situations and make decisions.⁹⁹ The second reason is the gains made in building mutual trust and shared understanding within an organization by understanding the culture of unified action partners.¹⁰⁰ Cultural understanding reduces the empathy gap between two populations. In the future OE, cultural understanding will play a pivotal role in the success of military operations.

The 2020-2040 Army Operating Concept (AOC) states that the key to a “strategic win” in the future OE is to “present the enemy with multiple dilemmas” and thereby compel enemy actions by “putting something of value to them at risk.”¹⁰¹ The word “strategic” was likely carefully selected to distinguish the desired future “win” from the “tactical” wins often experienced during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. If the key to a strategic win is to present the enemy with multiple dilemmas, empathizing with a threat or the local population to consider how they will respond to a dilemma is critical. A common definition of dilemma is a “difficult or persistent problem,” one that typically leaves a decision-maker with a “usually undesirable or unpleasant choice.”¹⁰² For the purpose of this study, the term “dilemma” is defined as a difficult or persistent problem or the difficulty in knowing how best to respond to an ambiguous opportunity. A single dilemma can provide a near insurmountable challenge to an inexperienced organization; being faced with unanticipated multiple dilemmas can lead to paralysis and strategic blunders.

Like friendly forces, the enemy is also challenged when faced with a dilemma. Empathetic leaders are more likely to recognize that “military operations are complex, human endeavors, characterized by the continuous, mutual adaptation of give and take, moves, and countermoves among all participants.”¹⁰³ When friendly forces impose their will, what they are doing, in a sense, is presenting a dilemma to the enemy. If US forces offer a simple problem, the enemy will be able to offer a more robust countermove, that is, a greater counter-dilemma. Anticipating how a threat will likely respond to dilemmas will allow an empathetic leader to exercise disciplined initiative and take actions more likely to “overwhelm the enemy physically and psychologically” with the “depth to

prevent enemy forces from recovering.”¹⁰⁴ Selecting the appropriate dilemmas to present to the threat will require thorough knowledge of the adversary so that Shore’s pattern breaks can be detected. Executing non-linear robust actions in response to unanticipated problems is how Army forces will retain and exploit the initiative in a complex world.¹⁰⁵

In a complex environment, what was once valued by the enemy may change. To be successful, leaders must possess the ability to empathize with the enemy in order to determine what is of value to them at that moment. Leaders who lack deep cultural understanding of the enemy or the local population will be unable to rapidly empathize in these situations. A greater discussion of empathy and its relationship to cultural understanding can be found in the literature of the University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies (UFMCS).

In *The Applied Critical Thinking Handbook*, UFMCS introduces the concept of “fostering cultural empathy.”¹⁰⁶ According to UFMCS, fostering cultural empathy is the process of “developing better questions about culture, in order to facilitate strategic and operational decision making which is informed by cultural empathy.”¹⁰⁷ An aim of the UFMCS approach is the reduction of “blind” ethnocentrism, defined as “the belief that one’s one culture is inherently superior to other cultures.”¹⁰⁸ Ethnocentrism can leave a leader “blind to the ability to see the world through the eyes of another national or ethnic group” which can considerably widen an empathy gap.¹⁰⁹

The way UFMCS frames the concept of empathy is subtly different from the references previously reviewed. In the UFMCS handbook, “empathy” is used interchangeably with the word “understanding,” and defined simply as “broader understanding.”¹¹⁰ In this sense, a leader gains cultural empathy by systematically

analyzing what is important to know about the OE.¹¹¹ The gained cultural understanding is then applied to produce insights that inform planning, decision-making, and policy.¹¹² Cultural empathy is therefore framed more as an end state condition, which is gained after careful analysis of a different culture. In contrast to UFMCS, FM 6-22 describes empathy as being a leader attribute.¹¹³ An individual with a greater capacity for empathy will be better able to gain cultural understanding because that person will more easily and more deeply gain cultural empathy by being able to ask the right questions. For the purpose of this study, empathy is viewed as an attribute that can be developed. Trout and Lowenstein's work concerning cold-to-hot empathy gaps also demonstrates that gaps exist within us, not just between cultures. UFMCS, like Shore's principles of strategic empathy, also alludes to the predictive quality of empathy, but with the following caveat: "the goal of general knowledge is not prediction per se, but understanding in order to control and influence the outcomes we desire in military operations."¹¹⁴

The Army's Current Empathy Development Strategy

FM 6-22, *Leadership Development*, serves as the definitive army reference for judgement, problem solving, and adaptability—the characteristics that “allow leaders and teams to address the demands of complex, ambiguous, and chaotic environments of military operations.”¹¹⁵ This reference provides specific guidance for improving the Army leadership competencies and attributes via feedback, study, and practice (see table 6).

Table 6. Displays Empathy	
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Gather feedback from [others] on your ability to read emotional cues of others. -Self-reflect on your successes and failures in perspective taken during the decision-making process. -Explicitly focus on emotional and social cues in conversations.
Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Select a role model and study their interactions with others. -Read relevant literature on empathy and social perspective taking -Learn more about the pitfalls associated with empathy failures. -Learn nonverbal cues that can help to indicate a person's emotional state. -Access the Virtual Improvement Center to complete: Beyond People Skills: Leveraging Your Understanding of Others module.
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Practice taking perspectives of different people (such as that of a local leader, coalition ally, adversary, or a different military specialty). Imagine what their assumptions and preferences would be. Do this when interacting with a peer or a group. Get to know your subordinates better so you can understand their issues. -Use red teaming by taking partner and adversary perspectives to challenge ideas and ensure consideration of all perspectives in the decision-making process. -Actively combat moral disengagement (convincing oneself that ethical standards do not apply to a certain situation) in peers and subordinates by directly addressing instances when they failed to show concern for others.

Source: US Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Leader Development* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2015), 7-17.

Within the study row in table 6 is the module titled: *Beyond People Skills: Leveraging Your Understanding of Others*.¹¹⁶ The Beyond People Skills Module (BPSM) is an interactive lesson that provides information on how to understand the effects or consequences that interpersonal skills have on various outcomes.¹¹⁷ The BPSM provides information on the characteristics that support “effective relating to others such as being perceptive, adaptive, self-aware, and authentic.”¹¹⁸ The BPSM offers questions so that a user can gauge whether they have an empathetic mindset, which the module refers to as

being able to “walk a mile in someone else’s shoes.”¹¹⁹ Finally, the BPSM offers scenarios so that the user can “demonstrate empathy and practice empathetic behavior.”¹²⁰ The purpose of the BPSM is to gain the knowledge that will “help you understand how you can better relate to others and how you can develop a more effective climate that will help you achieve success in your missions.”¹²¹

The BPSM has three primary benefits pertinent to this study. The first benefit is that the BPSM lists the positive mission impacts of understanding others (see table 7). A drawback of the BPSM is that the impacts are narrowly focused on the leader-subordinate relationship. For the purposes of this study, the impacts have been modified so that they encompass the impacts of a leader’s interactions with all others. The “leader development” impact is now “team member development” and “Soldier well-being” impact is now “well-being.” The second benefit is that the BPSM lists the top five mistakes when empathizing, which prevent the development of an empathetic mindset (see table 8). The third primary benefit is that the BPSM provides four steps so “leaders can learn and practice thinking empathetically” (see table 9).¹²² According to the BPSM, the approach in table 9 helps a leader to appreciate that subordinates will respond to your decisions differently so you can “tailor your decision or communication around your decision, accordingly.”¹²³ The bottom line of the BPSM is “individuals are individuals, so a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach won’t work.”¹²⁴

Table 7. Displays Empathy Impacts
Positive Mission Impacts
Improves judgement and decision making
Improves effectiveness of leader development (BPSM)
Improves effectiveness of team member development (modified)
Helps identify, address, and improve Soldier well-being
Helps identify, address, and improve well-being (modified)
Boost effectiveness in situations with no hierarchy (not used in this study)

Source: US Army, “Beyond People Skills: Leveraging Your Understanding of Others, Understanding Others: Characteristics, Actions, Impacts, Flowcharts,” MSAF 360, accessed 5 December 2015, <https://msaf1.army.mil/IMITraining/Lesson25/html/UnderstandingOthersJobAid.pdf>.

Table 8. Top Five Mistakes Made When Empathizing	
Mistake	Description
Failure to Listen to What Others Say	Occurs when “leaders don’t fully listen to the words that others say and the meaning behind them.”
Failure to Listen to How Others Say Things	“Failure to listen to how other say things means that leaders fail to pay attention to the indirect parts of communication.” These include: tone of voice, gestures, and posture.
Belief that Showing Compassion is Seen as a Weakness	“Some leaders think that by showing empathy, their subordinates will perceive them as weak.” Confusion of empathy with sympathy.
Lack of Self-Awareness	“To see things from others’ point of view, leaders must first understand and recognize their point of view and frame of reference.
Blinded by the Mission	Occurs when leaders are “so focused on mission accomplishment that they neglect to balance it with the welfare of their subordinates.”

Source: US Army, “Beyond People Skills: Leveraging Your Understanding Others: Characteristics, Actions, Impacts, Flowcharts,” MSAF 360, accessed 5 December 2015, <https://msaf1.army.mil/IMITraining/Lesson25/html/UnderstandingOthersJobAid.pdf>. Some information was truncated and paraphrased for the purpose of improving the presentation and ease of understanding within this study. Please refer to the module for the complete listing.

Table 9. Steps for Developing an Empathetic Mindset		
Step	Step Key Aspects	Description
1. You don't Know What you Don't Know	Ask yourself: -What are your attitudes, expectations, assumptions, and biases toward the individual and do you have enough information to make this judgment? -What expectations and assumptions might the other individual have drawn of you based on your past behavior?	Think about what you already know (or think you know) about the other person.
2. Think About How You (and Others) Think	7 Step "Ladder of Conclusion" -Observe—Date and experience that is observable. -Select Data —You select observable data to pay attention to. -Add Meanings—Consider the data, and then attach meanings to it (army culture for example). -Make Assumptions—Based on the attached meaning, make assumptions about why an individual behaves a certain way. -Draw Conclusions—Draw conclusions based on those assumptions. -Adopt Beliefs—Adopt beliefs about the world based on those conclusions. -Take Actions—Based on belief take action.	This step involves thinking about how you're selecting and making assumptions. The "Ladder of Conclusion" is a model for thinking about your thought process.
3. Keep Your Eyes and Ears Open	Ensure you: -Listen to hear meaning behind what the other person is saying and doing. -Be an active listener. -Pay attention to performance behavior. -Confront serious and challenging issues.	This step involves paying attention to what others say and do, as well as what they don't say and do.
4. Invest in Outcomes	Questions to discuss: -What do you expect out of me and how can I best earn your trust? -What types of things do you find motivating? -How do you like decisions to be made that affect you? -How do you usually get your point across?	This step involves discussing the questions to the left in order to determine how to most effectively work with the other person.

Source: US Army, "Beyond People Skills: Leveraging Your Understanding of Other, Understanding Others: Characteristics, Actions, Impacts, Flowcharts," MSAF 360, accessed 5 December 2015, <https://msaf1.army.mil/IMITraining/Lesson25/html/UnderstandingOthersJobAid.pdf>. Some information was truncated and paraphrased for the purpose of improving the presentation and ease of understanding within this study. Please refer to the module for the complete listing.

The Feedback, Study, and Practice Model (FSPM) is a valuable tool for an individual serious about developing an empathetic mindset, but it has two faults. The first fault is that application of empathy within the BPSM is too narrow. The lesson focus is on leading with empathy in order to develop a “climate that values relating to others” and does not delve into the topic of understanding an adversary or local population.¹²⁵ The lesson is therefore most applicable to the mission command principle of building cohesive teams through mutual trust.

The second fault is that FSPM guidance for improving empathy is an inside strategy. To build empathy capacity using the FSPM an individual first gathers feedback in order to determine their ability to read the emotional cues of others. If found lacking, the individual on their own accord selects measures from the study and practice rows until a suitable capacity for empathy is built. Making matters more difficult is that “display empathy” is just one of fifty-two individual attributes with an associated FSPM in FM 6-22.¹²⁶ The FSPM ignores powerful human bias that often cause inside strategies to fail. According to Trout:

The reasons [inside strategies fail] are easy to imagine. To implement this self-improving strategy correctly, you need to envision the different ways in which you might be mistaken. But this exercise is extremely effortful and, as a result, it is probably unrealistic to suppose we can be so vigilant. Imagine constantly policing your thoughts whenever you make a decision-with friends, at work, or relating at home. Was I overconfident in the statement I just made? How might the situation have turned out differently? Like any kind of exercise, inside strategies require a serious commitment of energy, for what may be only modest rewards. Will people have the discipline, motivation, and concentration required to implement inside strategies?¹²⁷

For example, the BPSM coaches a leader to avoid failing to listen to what others say by asking yourself if you can multi-task while listening; to rehearse what you are going to say next using your internal dialogue; not to pre-judge; to relate things in the

conversation back to the person's own experience.¹²⁸ These provide a sample of what a leader must be aware of to avoid just one of five mistakes, which prevent an empathetic mindset. When developing an empathetic mindset, step one directs that you should ask what your biases are about another person.¹²⁹ Unfortunately, as stated previously in this study, Trout reveals that our biases cannot be so easily revealed. These questions are also unlikely to provide much insight because of the self-serving bias. This bias occurs because "we have unwarranted confidence in our ability to 'read' people."¹³⁰ If followed, the guidance in FM 6-22 is likely to lead to a greater capacity for empathy within an individual. What is not known is how many will actually implement the FSPM in order to build empathy capacity.

Conclusion

War will continue to involve the interaction of human beings. The Army will operate in a future OE that is characterized by increasing urbanization. Army leaders will have greater contact with the population, threat, and displaced persons. Ubiquitous media and connectivity will increase the consequences of military operations within this dense human terrain. Individuals with a greater capacity for empathy will be more effective at executing Mission Command. Empathy is about understanding that can improve decision-making. Empathy is different from sympathy; it gives us insights that lead to greater team building and the creation of shared understanding. It allows us to see through the eyes of the threat in order to craft multiple dilemmas that will lead to their defeat. Shore demonstrates that empathy has a predictive quality. Trout's concept of empathy gaps explains why it is so difficult for a leader to understand someone so different from themselves. Lowenstein reminds us that hot and cold states can make it

hard for a person to understand themselves or others depending on their own emotional state. Descriptive theories, like the concept of bounded rationality, provide a useful frame to better understand the actions of people in real situations. With this understanding, leaders can create outside strategies to guide or prime the behavior of a population to accomplish some end. Empathy's impact on military operations is profound. In the next chapter, the methodology for determining how a leader's empathetic mindset influences mission command, and therefore affects a mission's outcome, will be examined.

¹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, ed. Lionel Giles (New York: Barnes and Nobel Press, 2003), 18.

² McMaster, 7.

³ US Army, TP 525-3-1, 11.

⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁷ Stanley A. McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2015), ix. Taken from the comments of Walter Isaacson in the foreword of *Team of Teams*.

⁸ Ibid., viii.

⁹ US Army, FM 6-22, 7-16.

¹⁰ US Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-12.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² US Army, FM 6-22, 6-2.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Merriam-Webster, s.v. "Simple Definition of Empathy," accessed 20 September 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy>.

- ¹⁵ Trout, 21.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 18.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 22.
- ¹⁹ US Army, FM 6-22, 7-16.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Zachary Shore, *A Sense of the Enemy: The High-Stakes History of Reading Your Rival's Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid., 6.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ This definition is an adaptation from the Merriam Webster, J. D. Trout, Zachary Shore, and FM 6-22 definitions.
- ²⁶ Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Capstone Concept*, 4.
- ²⁷ US Army, ADRP 6-0, 1-1.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 2-1.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Trout, 23.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid., 18.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 23.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 31.

³⁸ Evan McKirdy et al., “Beirut Mourns Its Dead; Weathers Comparisons to Paris,” *Cable News Network (CNN)*, 17 November 2015, accessed 17 November 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/16/middleeast/beirut-explosions>.

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⁴⁰ Carolyn Gregoire, “Explaining the ‘Empathy Gap’ In Our Reactions to Paris and Beirut,” *Huffington Post*, 17 November 2015, accessed 17 November 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/paris-beirut-response_5649d707e4b08cda34898202.

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⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Trout, 23.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁹ George Lowenstein, “Hot-Cold Empathy Gaps and Medical Decision Making,” *Health Psychology* 24, no. 4 (2005): S49.

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⁵¹ Trout, 34.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Lowenstein, S49.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Anne Barnard, “Inside Fallujah’s War: Empathy, Destruction Mark a Week with US Troops,” *Boston Globe*, 28 November 2004, accessed 16 April 2016, http://archive.boston.com/news/world/articles/2004/11/28/inside_fallujahs_war/?page=full.

⁵⁷ Patrick Cockburn, “Toxic Legacy of US Assault on Fallujah ‘Worse Than Hiroshima’,” *The Independent*, 23 July 2010, accessed 22 November 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/toxic-legacy-of-us-assault-on-fallujah-worse-than-hiroshima-2034065.html>.

⁵⁸ Jim Niklaszewski, “Still Locked Down, Fallujah Slow to Rebuild,” *NBC News*, 14 April 2005, accessed 17 November 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/7503610/#.VkubGnarSUK>.

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⁶¹ Lowenstein, S49.

⁶² US Army, Mission Command Center of Excellence, *Cognitive Biases and Decision Making: A Literature Review and Discussion of Implications for the US Army* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: USA MC CoE), accessed 17 November 2015, http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/publications/HDCDTF_WhitePaper_Cognitive%20Biases%20and%20Decision%20Making_Final_2015_01_09_0.pdf, 10.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁶ Peter M. Todd and Gerd Gigerenzer, “Précis of Simple Heuristics That Make Us Smart,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 23 (2000): 728, paraphrased in US Army, *Cognitive Bias and Decision Making: A Literature Review and Discussion of Implications for the Army*, 10.

⁶⁷ USA MC CoE, 11.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁰ Donella H. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*, ed. Diana Wright (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008), 105.

⁷¹ Ibid., 106.

⁷² Meadows, 106; Herman E. Daly, *Toward a Steady-State Economy* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1973), 17; Herbert Simon, “Theories of Bounded

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⁷⁴ Meadows, 106. The term “satisficing” attributed by Meadows and Wright to H. Simon, *Models of Man* (New York: Wiley, 1957).

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⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 108.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Trout, 115.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 19

⁸⁶ Ibid., 82.

⁸⁷ US Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-3.

⁸⁸ Trout, 63.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2.

⁹² Lt. Col Dave Grossman and Loren W. Christensen, *On Combat: The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and in Peace* (Belleville, IL: PPCT Research Publications, 2004), 195.

⁹³ Ibid., 196.

- ⁹⁴ Ibid., 197.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., 205.
- ⁹⁶ US Army, Army Doctrine and Training Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-9.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., 1-10.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid., iii.
- ¹⁰² Merriam-Webster, s.v. “Simple Definition of Dilemma,” accessed 1 May 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dilemma>.
- ¹⁰³ US Army, ADRP 6-0, 1-1.
- ¹⁰⁴ US Army, TP 525-3-1, iii.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁶ US Army, US Army Combined Arms Center (USACAC), *Applied Critical Thinking, The Applied Critical Thinking Handbook 7.0* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies/Red Teaming, 2015), 6.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
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- ¹⁰⁹ Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), 15, quoted in US Army, US Army Combined Arms Center (USACAC), *Applied Critical Thinking, the Applied Critical Thinking Handbook 7.0* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies/Red Teaming, 2015), 24.
- ¹¹⁰ USACAC, 26, 36.
- ¹¹¹ Ibid., 39.
- ¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ US Army, FM 6-22, 6-2.

¹¹⁴ USACAC, 39.

¹¹⁵ US Army, FM 6-22, 5-1.

¹¹⁶ US Army, “Beyond People Skills: Leveraging Your Understanding of Others Overview,” MSAF 360, accessed 5 December 2015, <http://msaf.army.mil/LeadOn.aspx>. Available at the MASF website (CAC enabled) in the Virtual Improvement Center (VIC).

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¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² US Army, “Beyond People Skills: Leveraging Your Understanding of Others, Developing an Empathetic Mindset,” MSAF 360, accessed 5 December 2015, <https://msaf1.army.mil/IMITraining/Lesson25/html/Topic2EmpathyKeyTakeaways.pdf>.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ US Army, “Beyond People Skills: Leveraging Your Understanding of Others, Feedback, Study, and Practice Model,” MSAF 360, accessed 5 December 2015, https://msaf1.army.mil/IMITraining/Lesson25/html/topicmenu_125t00015.html.

¹²⁶ US Army, FM 6-22, 7-4 - 7-5.

¹²⁷ Trout, 116.

¹²⁸ US Army, “Beyond People Skills: Leveraging Your Understanding of Others, Developing an Empathetic Mindset,” MSAF 360, accessed 5 December 2015, <https://msaf1.army.mil/IMITraining/Lesson25/html/Topic2EmpathyKeyTakeaways.pdf>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Trout, 113-114.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the qualitative research method to determine if a greater Army emphasis on empathy development would enhance the execution of mission command and therefore better enable leaders to win in the future complex OE. This chapter explains how this research proceeded to answer the primary research question. Next, this chapter introduces the two case studies selected for analysis in chapter 4, and the rationale for why they were selected. Finally, this chapter details the strengths and weaknesses of this approach.

As detailed in chapter 2, a range of sources was used to gain insight into the subordinate research questions. Army doctrine, papers, and interactive media were the primary sources of information used to determine what the human aspects of the complex future OE are and to detail the Army's current empathy development strategy. Civilian works were utilized to supplement incomplete accountings within doctrine in order to define empathy and to determine how empathy affects judgement, and as an extension, mission command. News articles provided examples, which shed light as to how a lack of empathy has impacted past military operations. The application of insight gained during the research process was necessary to determine the answer to the more pernicious subordinate research questions concerning the influence of empathy on the mission command philosophy and its impact on military operations. No source directly answered these questions and it was therefore necessary to arrive at the assertions in chapter 2 on these topics through deduction.

The case study research method was utilized in order to answer the primary research question. Each case study examines a commander operating in a complex OE to answer the three following questions: what empathy strength and need indicators did the commander exhibit; what were the impacts of the commander's empathetic mindset on the execution of mission command; what were the overall mission impacts as a result of the commander's mindset (see figure 1)? The five strength and four need empathy indicators listed in figure 1 are the same as those of FM 6-22. Each commander was assessed to determine which of the nine indicators they predominately demonstrate. Specific examples from primary and secondary sources are provided for any indicator that is demonstrated by the commander in order to aid in the evaluation of the individuals' empathetic mindset. Each example was then associated with the mission command principle, or principles, that it most influences. Positive and negative influences were then analyzed in order to determine the overall impact of the commander's empathetic mindset on the mission. The conclusions of the case study analysis were then used to support this study's conclusion as to whether a greater emphasis on developing empathy would better enable Army leaders to win in a complex future OE.

Case-Study Analysis: Subject Name*

Evaluation of Empathetic Mindset

Empathy Indicator	Vignette #
Ability to read emotional cues	
Considers other points of view in decision-making	
Shows compassion when others are distressed	
Predicts how others will react to certain events	
Demonstrates ability to establish good rapport	
Shows a lack of concern for others' emotional distress	
Displays an inability to take another's perspective	
Maintains an egocentric viewpoint in decision-making process	
Dehumanizes enemy combatants or local populace	

Mindset Influence on Mission Command

Principles of Mission Command	Vignette #
Build cohesive teams through mutual trust	
Create shared understanding	
Provide a clear commander's intent	
Exercise disciplined initiative	
Accept Prudent Risk	

Strength Indicators

Mission Impacts:

Need Indicators

*Indicators sourced from FM 6-22; Mission Command Principles as listed in ADRP 6-0

Figure 1. Case Study Analysis Worksheet

Source: Created by author; model adapted from US Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Leader Development* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 7-17; US Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2012), 2-1.

The first case study examines General Stanley McChrystal's command of the Joint Special Operations Task Force 714 from 2004 to 2008 and the Afghanistan war effort from 2009 to 2010. General McChrystal was selected for study for two primary reasons. The first reason was General McChrystal's high-level of familiarity within the Army as a result of his distinguished career and the popularity of his writings. Since retiring as a four-star general, General McChrystal has published two autobiographical

accounts: *My Share of the Task in 2013* and *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World in 2015*. These two works are well known within military circles. They provide a rich primary source of information in order to evaluate the degree of General McChrystal's empathetic mindset, and provide clues to how that mindset impacted the execution of mission command within his organizations. The second reason were the similarities that exist between the Iraq OE and the anticipated future OE, as described in the 2014 Army Operating Concept. In 2004, the Iraq OE contained many of the anticipated human aspects of the future OE. General McChrystal faced Al Qaeda in Iraq, a foe that maintained a "decentralized network that could move quickly, strike ruthlessly, and then seemingly vanish in the local population."¹ General McChrystal's task force operated within dense urban areas and among a diverse and interconnected human population, key characteristics of the future OE.

The second case study examines Colonel Michael Dane Steele's command of 3rd Brigade (Rakkasans) of the 101st Airborne Division. Colonel Steele was selected for study for two primary reasons. The first reason was that Colonel Steele's controversial tour of command currently serves as a case study at the Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Therefore, like General McChrystal, the circumstances surrounding Colonel Steele's time in command are well known amongst military professionals. Second, a mix of secondary and primary sources exist which shed light on Colonel Steele's empathetic mindset, and the possible ways it impacted the outcomes of 3rd Brigade's mission in Iraq. The primary sources are Colonel Steele's own words, recorded in a speech delivered to his troops prior to deploying, and Raffi Khatchadourian's article, *The Kill Company*.

The strengths of this method are varied. Broad qualitative research on the topics of the anticipated future OE, empathy, and mission command set the condition for the analysis in chapter 4. With this information, it was possible to discern empathy's role in the execution of the mission command philosophy and its impacts on mission outcomes. The case study method permits a critical examination of two well-known commanders and an opportunity to better understand how their empathetic mindset influenced their organizations. The case study method also provides an opportunity to apply the research described in chapter 2 to real world examples in order to test their validity.

This method suffers from two weaknesses. The first weakness of this approach is that the process of deduction was necessary in order to fill the gaps in subordinate research questions. No sources were identified during the research process, which commented on empathy's role in the execution of mission command. Arriving at the conclusions presented in chapter 2 required a broad synthesis of works from a variety of sources. Not everyone will agree that the presented research supports the general conclusions that were reached. The second weakness of this approach is that the "cherry picking" of examples from the case studies is possible. This would lead to possibly overinflating the impacts of the subject's empathetic mindset on the outcomes of the case. The primary risk of cherry picking data is that an erroneous conclusion may be reached.

Conclusion

This study utilized a range of sources to gain insight into the role of empathy in the execution of mission command. The purpose of this research is to determine if a greater Army emphasis on empathy development would enhance the execution of mission command and therefore better enable leaders to win in the future complex OE.

The available literature described the anticipated future OE, the Army's current empathy development strategy, and how empathy affects judgement, and by extension, mission command. This research informed the development of the three following questions: what empathy strength and need indicators did the commander exhibit; what were the impacts of the commander's empathetic mindset on the execution of mission command; what were the overall mission impacts as a result of the commander's mindset. Using the case study research method, General Stanley McChrystal and Colonel Michael Steele were examined using these three questions to guide the analysis of their respective cases. The next chapter presents these two analyzed case studies.

¹ McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*. Information sourced from the inside flap of dust jacket.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Leaders are empathetic. The best leaders I've seen have an uncanny ability to understand, empathize, and communicate with those they lead. They need not agree or share the same background or status in society as their followers, but they understand their hopes, fears, and passions. Great leaders intuitively sense, or simply ask, how people feel and what resonates with them.¹

— General Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*

This chapter presents two case studies in order to examine how the subject's empathetic mindset influenced the execution of mission command and the overall mission impacts as a result of that mindset. The two examined subjects are General Stanley McChrystal and Colonel Michael Steele. Each case study is arranged into a series of vignettes, which are individually analyzed. The results of this analysis are used in this chapter's conclusion to support this study's findings—that a greater Army emphasis on empathy development would enhance the execution of mission command and therefore better enable Army leaders to win a future complex OE.

Case Study 1: General Stanley McChrystal

The first subject to be examined is General Stanley McChrystal. General McChrystal's case study is separated into nine vignettes. The first seven vignettes cover selected situations, which occurred during General McChrystal's command of Task Force 714 (TF 714) from October 2003 to June 2008. The first vignette, "Taking Command of Task Force 714," covers General McChrystal's initial challenges integrating into his new command. The second vignette, "Knowing the Enemy," describes the rudimentary targeting efforts then underway within TF 714, and one of General McChrystal's first

close encounters with the Iraqi insurgency. The third vignette, “Intelligence Handling,” is an account of the obstacles that were hampering the creation of a shared understanding of the threat. The fourth vignette, “Establishing the Joint Interagency Task Force,” covers team building efforts between TF 714 and its interagency partners in Afghanistan. The fifth vignette, “The Rise of Zarqawi,” details General McChrystal’s evolving understanding of insurgent leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The sixth vignette, “Networked,” demonstrates how General McChrystal continued to build upon his earlier work to further increase partnership and build trust. The seventh vignette, “The Death of Zarqawi,” covers detainee operations and the mission, which resulted in the death of Zarqawi.

The eighth and ninth vignettes relate to General McChrystal’s command of the Afghanistan war effort from June 2009 to June 2010. Vignette 8, “Afghanistan Initiatives,” covers General McChrystal’s Afghanistan listening tour during which he increased his understanding of the issues facing the coalition mission. Vignette 9, “Assessment and Resignation,” covers issues concerning Afghanistan President Karzai, criticisms of General McChrystal’s counterinsurgency strategy, and his resignation. This case study concludes with a brief analysis as to the possible mission outcomes, which can be attributed to General McChrystal’s empathetic mindset’s influence on mission command.

Vignette 1: Assuming Command of Task Force 714

General McChrystal assumed command of TF 714 on 6 October 2003.² Like most new commanders, one of General McChrystal’s first tasks was to review the organization’s most recent Command Climate Survey.³ The survey revealed that the most

consistent complaint among the operators was, “too many Rangers.”⁴ General McChrystal stated that this comment “was not surprising, as Rangers, long viewed as the junior varsity of TF 714, continued to struggle in this small world to be recognized as equals of the more specialized forces they were increasingly serving alongside.”⁵ After having commanded Ranger units at the company, battalion, and regiment level, General McChrystal reflected that the survey comment “did little to bolster my confidence.”⁶ For General McChrystal, rejoining the Special Forces community after being “stuck in the halls of the Pentagon for the invasion of Iraq,” felt like he carried a “stigma of not having been on hand for the trial by fire.”⁷

Shortly after taking command, General McChrystal visited a compound of elite Special Forces operators within TF 714 in Fort Bragg, North Carolina.⁸ He stated that although TF 714 was “envisioned as a team of teams,” it more closely resembled a “tribe of tribes,” and that “tribalism made them insular.”⁹ “Entering the compound,” General McChrystal remembered, “was always a bit intimidating, seemingly by design.”¹⁰ In a conference room, sat about sixty operators, many “fresh from combat,” while General McChrystal viewed himself as “the new commanding general, just out of the safe halls of the Pentagon.”¹¹ Looking at their faces, some familiar from previous assignments, but now more experienced, General McChrystal realized that he “needed to recalibrate our relationship.”¹² To recalibrate that relationship and establish new bonds with the TF 714 elements, then deployed, General McChrystal set out to Iraq, because “as always, I wanted to see the battlefield for myself.”¹³

Upon his arrival to Iraq, General McChrystal participated in a raid to search and clear a number of houses thought to belong to suspected insurgents.¹⁴ His purpose for

accompanying the operators that night was to “understand what was happening on the ground” and to take the opportunity to “build relationships and mutual trust with the men and women I led.”¹⁵ After four months in command of TF 714, General McChrystal commented that he was “unsure of where I stood” with the operators, whose “demeanor around me was correct but cautiously stiff.”¹⁶ General McChrystal observed that upon entering a room that a group of Iraqi occupants, “turned from watching the operators comb through their belongings to look at me.”¹⁷ I’ll never forget their stare. It was controlled but I sensed pure anger, radiating like heat.”¹⁸ General McChrystal remarked, “It was one o’clock in the morning, and our searching their home was as humiliating to them as if we had stripped their bodies.”¹⁹ Even with the care and sensitivity displayed by the operators during the search, the Iraqis, “never ceased glowering.”²⁰ Despite knowing that “we needed to do these raids,” General McChrystal also knew that the searches, in addition to the other issues plaguing the country at the time, “were producing fury, understandably directed at us.”²¹ General McChrystal concluded his retelling of the operation by stating, “Watching them watch us, I realized this fight was going to be long and tough.”²²

Analysis

General McChrystal’s actions and reflections on joining TF 714 and the raid demonstrate several empathy strength indicators, which influenced his ability to execute mission command. General McChrystal’s comments on his operators’ demeanor and the anger of the Iraqi occupants suggest an ability to read emotional cues. This positively influenced his integration into the insular Special Forces community. His desire to share the danger of his operators on the raid shows an ability to establish good rapport with his

subordinates. ADRP 6-0 states that “shared experiences” and “sharing hardships and dangers” are two ways leaders can gain trust.²³ In Trout’s parlance, visiting his units and participating in the raid effectively reduced the empathy gap that existed between the newly arrived Pentagon general and the combat hardened operators.²⁴ This example, therefore, demonstrates how General McChrystal’s empathetic mindset influenced the mission command principle of building cohesive teams through mutual trust.

In addition to showing compassion for the humiliation experienced by the Iraqis during searches, General McChrystal’s observations of the Iraqi emotional cues led him to predict in 2003 that the fight in Iraq would be a difficult one. According to ADRP 6-0, “successful commanders” when creating shared understanding, “invest the time and effort to visit Soldiers” in order to “understand their issues and concerns.”²⁵ One could argue that successful commanders also visit or seek contact with the local population and enemy to understand their issues and concerns as well. These empathetic observations were steps, which influenced the creation of shared understanding in TF 714.

Vignette 2: Knowing the Enemy

In October 2003, General McChrystal’s focus was the targeting of Saddam Hussein and his former regime members.²⁶ To this end, General McChrystal visited a small detachment of TF 714 operators having little success conducting targeting missions in Mosul.²⁷ The detachment’s ineffectiveness was in large part due to the undeveloped situational awareness at the time and the limited bits of intelligence from the TF 714 headquarters in Baghdad.²⁸ According to General McChrystal, the operators “were working hard to understand the people who lived in the big city down the hill from their compound,” but that they were “largely cut off from the rest of our force.”²⁹ General

McChrystal felt that “despite their talent and dedication, the team’s isolation limited their ability to contribute effectively.”³⁰

Upon leaving the detachment via airlift, General McChrystal’s helicopter took an unexpected sharp turn.³¹ Over the headset, the pilot relayed that the helicopter behind them had been shot down after being clipped by a rocket-propelled grenade.³² The unharmed crew was loaded into General McChrystal’s helicopter. Once safely in the air, General McChrystal asked how the pilot from the downed aircraft was, to which the pilot replied, “I’m pissed off, sir.”³³ As the helicopter continued on to his destination, General McChrystal “turned my thoughts to our enemy.”³⁴

I tried to picture the man who had bravely shot at us and what had brought him out to the desert to do so. He would have needed a certain level of commitment to stand in open ground, in broad daylight, and take a potshot at two heavily armed Coalition helicopters. Surely, in that area of Iraq and at that time, he was Sunni. But what motivated him? With the accuracy of his rocket, was he a disenfranchised Baathist soldier? Or was he younger and more devout than his Baathist counterparts, taking orders from Ansar al-Sunnah, an Al Qaeda-allied jihadist group with a presence in the region? Contrary to the administration’s official line, the attack did not, to me, smack of desperation. It seemed to signal, “Game on.”³⁵

In the face of this determined resolve, General McChrystal concludes that the greatest obstacle to the effectiveness of the detachments was the lack of real-time links to an active TF 714 network.³⁶

Analysis

General McChrystal’s comment on the effectiveness of the Mosul TF 714 detachment and reaction to the rocket propelled grenade attack demonstrates several empathy strength indicators. Rather than place the blame on the operators for their apparent lack of success in Mosul, General McChrystal first considered the operators

predicament from their point of view. By seeing the situation through the eyes of his operators, General McChrystal was able to come to the conclusion that the problem lay, not with the group of operators who “were accomplishing as much as a team of sixteen could,” but with his own headquarters, which “lacked a common strategy or network” to prosecute the war.³⁷ General McChrystal's compassion for the detachment's situation and face-to-face rapport building significantly improved his ability to frame the problem facing the task force.

General McChrystal also demonstrated the ability to accurately understand the position of the enemy. Rather than dehumanizing or responding with unproductive anger to the rocket propelled grenade attack, General McChrystal instead empathized with “the man who had bravely shot at us.”³⁸ Empathizing enabled General McChrystal to gain a key insight—the man's action demonstrated Sunni resolve, not desperation.³⁹ The ability to collaboratively frame problems is listed by ADRP 6-0 as a way commanders create shared understanding when executing mission command.⁴⁰ General McChrystal's empathetic mindset enabled him to understand that the problem facing the TF 714 lay not with his operators but with his headquarters, and that change was necessary if they were to defeat a determined enemy.

Vignette 3: Intelligence Handling

In the fall of 2003, amidst a growing insurgency, General McChrystal realized that his rear headquarters, which contained many analysts, was not relevant to the forward operators.⁴¹ TF 714 operators obtained a significant amount of raw intelligence, in the form of captured documents and electronic devices, during the conduct of raids.⁴² Detainees and other persons on or near the objective also had information that was of

value to the TF 714 mission.⁴³ According to General McChrystal, “human error, insufficient technology, and organizational strictures” limited the intelligence extracted from these sources affecting the ability of the task force to execute follow-on missions.⁴⁴ The single intelligence analyst assigned to the forward teams could not keep up with the amount of material brought in by the operators, and the operators lacked the training, resources, and time to exploit the captured insurgents.⁴⁵ The lack of effective intelligence handling procedures forced the teams to glean whatever was possible from the captured materials before filling “emptied sandbags, burlap sacks, or clear plastic trash bags with these scooped-up piles of documents, CDs, computers, and cell phones.”⁴⁶ The material then wound up, often unexamined, in the TF 714 HQ intelligence-handling facility’s spare room.⁴⁷

General McChrystal observed, “Fundamentally, the senders and receivers, in the case of the forward team and its higher headquarters, had neither a shared picture of the enemy nor an ability to prosecute a common fight against it.”⁴⁸ In a collaborative problem-solving session with a task force deputy commander, General McChrystal realized that his rear headquarters were not enabling his forward teams.⁴⁹ Frustrated analysts in the rear headquarters had no context for the materials and detainees captured by the forward teams while the teams held the perception that any information sent to the headquarters was like sending it to a black hole.⁵⁰ According to General McChrystal, “this inspired territoriality and distrust.”⁵¹ General McChrystal’s inspection of the intelligence-handling facility resulted in a resolution to “tie the forward teams and rear headquarters into a single fight.”⁵²

Analysis

This example clearly demonstrates how General McChrystal's empathetic mindset influenced his ability to effectively create shared understanding within his organization. The intelligence issues facing TF 714 were "starving the teams of information," which made the fight against the enemy network "sluggish and excruciating."⁵³ While General McChrystal noted that limited bandwidth was a factor in the breakdown in the unity of effort, his analysis went deeper than simply ordering technological fixes.⁵⁴ His read of his analysts' frustration was no doubt a factor in concluding that the human error inherent in his intelligence operations was the result of a lack of rapport between his operators and analysts. He did not arrive at this conclusion on his own, but took into account the point of view of the TF 714 deputy commander, who agreed with General McChrystal's assertion that the rear headquarters had little impact on independent campaign being conducted by the forward teams. According to ADRP 6-0, when executing mission command, commanders "establish human connections to create a shared understanding."⁵⁵ To build cohesive teams through mutual trust and break down the inspired territoriality, General McChrystal's empathetic mindset enabled him to see that it was first necessary to build the human connections within TF 714.

Vignette 4: Establishing the Joint Interagency Task Force

In early 2004, General McChrystal concluded, "there was no single person or place" that TF 714 could strike that would result in the defeat of Al Qaeda.⁵⁶ Instead, he reasoned that the fight against Al Qaeda would require the simultaneous targeting of not only its upper echelon members, but also the increasing powerful local elements.⁵⁷ General McChrystal believed that, "If onlookers saw that the organization [Al Qaeda]

was losing—fleeing territory, hemorrhaging people—its brand would suffer.”⁵⁸ Despite TF 714’s tactical and technological advantages, “counterproductive infighting” among the CIA) and other interagency partners in Washington threatened the campaign to bring down Al Qaeda.⁵⁹

To correct this deficiency General McChrystal established a Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) in order to bring “to bear all of the potential intelligence resources of the US Government.”⁶⁰ The JIATF fused the products offered by the various intelligence agencies in order to increase the situational understanding of the threat.⁶¹ The establishment of the JIATF was necessary according to General McChrystal because the centralized analysis conducted in Washington D.C. suffered from the “Beltway Culture” that “compelled, or allowed, the agencies to be less collaborative.”⁶² “In Washington, the myriad competing priorities, from bureaucracy to family life, always slowed action;” this at a time when speed and collaboration was vital to keep pace with the rapidly evolving situation on the ground.⁶³ The JIATF brought analysts from each agency and placed them into the “same literal tent.”⁶⁴

Bringing the analysts closer to the fight had two advantages. The first advantage was that intelligence products were developed faster and had greater relevancy.⁶⁵ The second advantage, “though less obvious but more important,” was that having the analysts in country “dramatically increased the sense of shared mission and purpose.”⁶⁶ General McChrystal believed this was because “it was extraordinarily powerful for analysts to share information, to brief operators on their assessment, to hear the rotors of an assault force launching on their information, and then to debrief together after their operation.”⁶⁷

The JIATF remained a top priority for General McChrystal during his next four and a half years while in command of TF 714, despite several challenges.⁶⁸ General McChrystal reported that “shoring up support at the top levels by keeping participation in the JIATF” was a task, which took much of his time.⁶⁹ An additional challenge was the task force’s relationship to the CIA, which General McChrystal described as being both “infuriating” and “productive.”⁷⁰ He recalled that “more than once, my most trusted subordinates had to stop me, in moments of utter frustration, from severing all ties with our ‘Agency brothers,’ repeating back to me my own guidance to preserve our relationships.”⁷¹ Still, General McChrystal remarked that he “admired them [CIA personnel] for their tolerance,” who, no doubt, had “mixed sentiments” about him.⁷² The JIATF, General McChrystal stated, was “not a tipping point for our effectiveness,” but a necessary effort that “began the process of turning TF 714 from a collection of niche strike forces into a network able to integrate diverse elements of the US government into a unified effort.”⁷³

Analysis

General McChrystal’s resolution to establish a JIATF is an example as to how a commander’s empathetic mindset can influence the mission command principles of building cohesive teams through mutual trust and creating shared understanding. The decision to establish the JIATF was made in response to the “inspired territoriality” discussed in the previous vignette, and to the “counterproductive infighting” between the various US agencies.⁷⁴ The formation of the JIATF suggests that General McChrystal understood that things like physical distance, different agencies, and different specialties make it difficult for people to understand and collaborate with one another. The

differences perceived to exist between members of TF 714 and those from the “Beltway Culture” created what Trout would define as an empathy gap.⁷⁵ By bringing all the stakeholders under the same tent, the JIATF set the conditions to reduce the distance of the empathy gap. This enabled the formation of the “human connections” identified by ADRP 6-0 as being necessary to create shared understanding between the competing agencies.⁷⁶

General McChrystal’s sometimes infuriating relationship with the CIA demonstrates that reducing empathy gaps is not as simple as just being in the same tent. General McChrystal’s remark about the CIA having mixed sentiments about him suggests an ability to read emotional cues. His remarks that he admired the CIA personnel for their tolerance despite being at odds with them suggests that he had an ability to consider others’ points of view while avoiding the trap of disparaging or dehumanizing people opposed to him, which closes the distance of empathy gaps. General McChrystal’s relationship with the CIA also shows how a commander’s own guidance, issued while in what Lowenstein would describe as a cold state, can influence the execution of mission command.⁷⁷ General McChrystal remarked that in periods of utter frustration, what Lowenstein would describe as a hot state, he nearly severed all ties with the CIA.⁷⁸ According to General McChrystal, only the parroting of his own guidance to preserve relationships by his subordinates prevented this from occurring.⁷⁹ This is an example of what Trout would refer to as outside strategies designed in this instance to ameliorate the effects of a cold-to-hot empathy gap.⁸⁰ General McChrystal’s empathetic mindset allowed him to predict that the empathy gap between the members of his task force and the CIA would cause friction, and that the friction may be so severe as

to cease collaborative efforts. According to Trout, outside strategies are designed to make it easy to do things that are good for us (such as exercise in public parks), and make it easy not to do things we shouldn't (such as run up credit card debt)."⁸¹ General McChrystal's guidance to preserve relationships was an outside strategy because it automatically made it difficult for members of TF 714 to not collaborate no matter what their level of frustration. In an interesting validation of Lowenstein's cold-to-hot empathy gap theory, General McChrystal's outside strategy set the conditions for building cohesive teams through mutual trust because it limited the impacts of his own hot state behavior.

Vignette 5: The Rise of Zarqawi

In January of 2004, Kurdish Peshmerga forces arrested an Al Qaeda courier who was carrying a letter written from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi to Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.⁸² The letter detailed the strategy the Jordanian-born Sunni terrorist leader planned to pursue in Iraq.⁸³ Zarqawi wrote that the "insurmountable obstacle, the lurking snake, the crafty and malicious scorpion, the spying enemy, and the penetrating venom," were the Shia.⁸⁴ Zarqawi viewed the Americans in General McChrystal's words as a "paper tiger."⁸⁵ Zarqawi would execute relentless attacks against the Shiite civilians in order to provoke violent reprisals and escalate tensions until a full sectarian war was ignited.⁸⁶ Zarqawi believed that only in the "high pitch" of total war could the "rage and sympathy" of worldwide Sunni population be harnessed for the return of the caliphate.⁸⁷ Making good on his words, Zarqawi's operatives launched a series of vicious attacks against Shia-packed crowds, who were openly celebrating Ashura in Iraq for the first time in thirty years.⁸⁸

General McChrystal observed in the aftermath of the Ashura that “the sheer ferocity of these attacks, and the terroristic tendency they lent to the insurgency, convinced me this fight would be long and difficult.”⁸⁹ From this observation, he reasoned that “TF 714 would need to acquire roles and expertise that would demand clear mental, moral, and operational focus.”⁹⁰ This would prevent the force from falling into “moral and political traps” that history had demonstrated counterinsurgents often fell victim to.⁹¹ General McChrystal’s concern was heightened by the events surrounding the capture and eventual execution of the deposed Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein.⁹² General McChrystal recollected that he “cringed” when, in December 2003, Ambassador Bremer declared during a broadcasted news release, “Ladies and Gentlemen, we got him!”⁹³ According to General McChrystal, “this was the kind of triumphalism that I knew would not play well with the Iraqi people.”⁹⁴ Following the announcement, General Sanchez took the podium, and showed the now infamous video of US medics conducting checks on a disheveled Saddam.⁹⁵ The video presentation was met with “loud whistles and cheers” from the Shia audience and cries of “Death to Saddam!”⁹⁶ General McChrystal commented that the death shouts reflected a degree of Shia anger that was “unimaginable to most Americans.”⁹⁷ General McChrystal believed that the cheers and chants likely “amplified fearful questions that had been growing among Sunnis,” which could be exploited by men like Zarqawi.⁹⁸ For these purposes, General McChrystal held a commander’s conference in the spring of 2004 in Bagram to devise a new way ahead.⁹⁹

General McChrystal stated that commander’s conferences were “especially valuable” for TF 714 because of the “insularity and elitism ingrained in some of our units.”¹⁰⁰ According to General McChrystal, the conferences helped TF 714 “build a

sense of teamwork across the force and aligned our strategy.”¹⁰¹ During the conference, General McChrystal was careful “not to attach any message or opinion” to the preconference reading materials to ensure that the participants came with “fresh opinions.”¹⁰² General McChrystal also brought in the distinguished historian and security advisor, Douglas Porch, to provide an outside perspective on counterinsurgency practices.¹⁰³ The conference resulted in two key points. The first point was General McChrystal’s assertion that “we fundamentally do not understand what is going on outside the wire.”¹⁰⁴ The second was his concern for torture. General McChrystal informed the group that he believed that torture would be a “self-defeating” tactic.¹⁰⁵ General McChrystal imparted to the group that everyone in the organization needed to know that “how we conducted ourselves was critical.”¹⁰⁶ He also viewed detainee operations as “an operational risk” that could result in the disbanding of TF 714 if the force got it wrong.¹⁰⁷ General McChrystal’s comments would seem prescient, when only three weeks after the TF 714 conference, pictures were released which showed American Soldiers abusing inmates of Abu Ghraib detention facility, which resulted in worldwide, anger and disgust.¹⁰⁸

Analysis

The Bagram conference was a tool used by General McChrystal to collaboratively create shared understanding in TF 714, and to provide his intent to his subordinate key leaders. This tool was made more effective due to his empathetic mindset. General McChrystal’s reaction to Zarqawi’s campaign of violence serves as an example of a commander, who is capable of predicting how others will react to certain events, and one capable of considering others’ points view in decision-making. General McChrystal

correctly reasoned that the purpose of Zarqawi's attack on the Shiite civilians was to create violent "back-and-forth" reprisals along sectarian lines until the outbreak of full-scale civil war.¹⁰⁹

From a systems perspective, Zarqawi's aim was to create what author Donella H. Meadows would describe as a "reinforcing feedback loop" in Iraq.¹¹⁰ According to Meadows, "reinforcing feedback loops are self-enhancing, leading to exponential growth or to runaway collapses over time."¹¹¹ Meadows argued that "reducing the gain around a reinforcing loop—slowing the growth—is usually a more powerful leverage point in systems than strengthening balancing loops, and far more preferable than letting the reinforcing loop run."¹¹² The Bagram conference demonstrated General McChrystal's desire to "reduce the gain" on the violent feedback loop that was then gaining strength in Iraq. His empathetic mindset made it possible to intuit that the "sheer ferocity" of the situation in Iraq could goad American forces to fall into the counterinsurgent's trap of strengthening an already dangerous reinforcing feedback loop through immoral or callous actions.¹¹³ This insight would impact General McChrystal's execution of mission command.

According to ADRP 6-0, a commander's intent is a "clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation" which provides "focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander's desired results."¹¹⁴ The commander's intent allows subordinates to "gain insight into what is expected of them" and what "constraints apply."¹¹⁵ The Bagram conference created shared understanding collaboratively, the results of which were used by General McChrystal to convey his intent. He demonstrated empathy when he considered other points of view by inviting

outside experts, like Douglas Porch, to the conference and by not attaching any of his own opinion to the pre-conference material. His empathetic read on the growing violence in Iraq and the reprisals it could generate within the population and his own force informed his situational understanding. With this insight, he issued guidance to TF 714 making it clear that professional conduct was paramount and that torture was a self-defeating tactic. General McChrystal's comment that he cringed as a result of Ambassador Bremer's triumphalism demonstrates an ability to show compassion for the then down-and-out Sunni population and to predict how they would respond. It also is a warning that even experienced people like Ambassador Bremer can commit strategic blunders when they show a lack of concern when others are distressed.

Like his decision to preserve relationships in the JIATF, General McChrystal's intent conveyed at the conference can be viewed as another outside strategy taken to reduce the effects of the cold-to-hot empathy gaps in TF 714. General McChrystal recognized that violence beget powerful emotions; as the TF 714 commander, it was his responsibility to set the conditions that reduced the likelihood of his operators acting in ways, which could impact achieving his desired results. His prediction and concern was justified by the disgraceful events that came to light from the Abu Ghraib detention facility.

Vignette 6: Networked

General McChrystal's core operational concept became, "It takes a network to defeat a network."¹¹⁶ "Building that network," he reflected, "would prove to be one [of] the largest challenges I faced in my career."¹¹⁷ General McChrystal sought to turn TF 714 in Iraq from an "insular" and "hierarchical force" to one "whose success relied on

reflexive sharing of information.”¹¹⁸ Its members would have the “confidence and training to operate without detailed instructions or constant supervision.”¹¹⁹ To achieve this end, General McChrystal sought to weave relationships between TF 714 and other organizations in Iraq, and build on the work he had started with his first JIATF in Afghanistan.¹²⁰

General McChrystal’s vision for TF 714 “required the participation of the US government departments and agencies that were involved in counterterrorism, like State, Treasury, the CIA, and the FBI.”¹²¹ Because the participation and cooperation of these organizations with TF 714 was essentially voluntary, General McChrystal set to make the task force “more appealing to partners.”¹²² He achieved this by being more accommodating to the agencies he was “courting,” and establishing a new hub in an Iraqi hanger in Balad.¹²³

The hub “was Spartan;” there was no TV or other diversions that could distract from fighting the war.¹²⁴ A large portion of the hangar space was dedicated to what was referred to as the Situational Awareness Room.¹²⁵ This space housed workstations for key staff members and seats for governmental agency liaisons.¹²⁶ General McChrystal commented that the Situational Awareness Room “reflected how my command style and command team were evolving.”¹²⁷ To reinforce “the message I preached about focused, unadorned commitment,” he “lived in a plywood hooch about twenty meters from the entrance to the bunker. . . . The room was spare, but convenient.”¹²⁸ To prevent the “compartmentalized traditions” that the task force and government agencies were prone to, the space was designed with few interior walls so that “secrecy was no excuse for not cooperating with the rest of the team.”¹²⁹

One of the key problems in developing an adaptable and capable network was the prevalence of “blinks” in the targeting process.¹³⁰ “A ‘blink’ was anything that slowed or degraded” the targeting of individuals.¹³¹ Most of the degradation could be traced to a lack of trust.¹³² Blinks in the targeting process were routinely occurring as a result of the intelligence sharing relationship between members of TF 714 and the National Security Agency.¹³³ TF 714 wanted to see raw National Security Agency intercepts immediately, but the Agency was concerned that TF 714 personnel lacked the requisite in-house knowledge to process the information and refused to share.¹³⁴ General McChrystal commented that discussing the degradation in the targeting process “in terms of ‘blinks’ helped us to identify and parse these choke points and to empathize with the viewpoints and incentives of our partners.”¹³⁵

The hub in Balad also enabled TF 714 to build trust with the other governmental agencies.¹³⁶ General McChrystal reflected that the “greatest chance for improvement lay in how people felt about their involvement.”¹³⁷ To enhance their sense of involvement, General McChrystal “leaned hard” on the operators to use video teleconferencing technology to increase the number of face-to-face interactions.¹³⁸ TF 714 also instructed people to “share more than they were comfortable with and to do so with anyone who wanted to be part of our network.”¹³⁹ This meant that any captured intelligence was released without preconditions and was widely distributed—automatically.¹⁴⁰ General McChrystal remarked that “the actual information shared was important, but more valuable was the trust built up through voluntarily sharing it with others.”¹⁴¹

The primary method for gaining what General McChrystal referred to as “shared consciousness” and transparency was the task force Operations and Intelligence Brief

(O&I).¹⁴² Known in the military as the O&I, the brief's purpose is for the "leadership of a given command to integrate everything the command is doing with everything it knows."¹⁴³ General McChrystal referred to the O&I as the "heart muscle of the organism we sought to create and the pulse by which it would live or die."¹⁴⁴ According to General McChrystal, "the meeting ran six days a week and was never cancelled."¹⁴⁵ Initially, only the CIA's seat in the Situational Awareness Room was filled.¹⁴⁶ Eventually, General McChrystal's "hypothesis had been confirmed: because the intelligence agencies got faster and more robust intelligence from the Task Force than from any other source, they dramatically increased their participation."¹⁴⁷ The information shared during the O&I was "so rich, so timely, and so pertinent to the fight" that soon over seven thousand people attended the O&I electronically from all over the world.¹⁴⁸ "Steadily," General McChrystal commented, "in large part as a result of internal embedding and LNOs, and complemented by the growing O&I," the "bonds of trust began to form," and "people from different tribes" began to see themselves as "part of a familiar and trusted unit entity."¹⁴⁹

During the O&I, General McChrystal reflected that "there were constant opportunities to lead."¹⁵⁰ General McChrystal found that in TF 714, "the role of the senior leader was no longer that of controlling puppet master, but rather that of an empathetic crafter of culture."¹⁵¹ The O&I served as General McChrystal's "most effective leadership tool" because it allowed him "to demonstrate the culture I sought."¹⁵² Chairing the O&I, "while wearing my combat uniform against an austere plywood backdrop," visually communicated his focus and commitment to his audience.¹⁵³ This enabled him to "demand effort from the force" or greater "support from Washington,

D.C.” with enhanced legitimacy.¹⁵⁴ When junior analysts were given the challenging task of briefing during the O&I, General McChrystal “made it a point to greet them by their first name.”¹⁵⁵ The names, listed in a “cheat sheet” provided by members of his staff, were used by General McChrystal as “one small gesture to put them at ease.”¹⁵⁶ For General McChrystal, “‘Thank you’ became my most important phrase, interest and enthusiasm my most powerful behaviors.”¹⁵⁷

In addition to building relationships with other governmental agencies and within his own organization, General McChrystal made a concerted effort to increase the partnership between special and conventional forces.¹⁵⁸ General McChrystal recognized in late 2003, that while conventional forces appreciated the work of TF 714 operators, the lack of communication links meant that his team’s decent relations with their conventional hosts had not amounted to much.¹⁵⁹ The anemic partnership between TF 714 and conventional forces became even clearer in the build up to the second battle of Fallujah in 2004.¹⁶⁰ General McChrystal commented that he had “established too few links” with the conventional command responsible for clearing the city of insurgents.¹⁶¹ To remedy this mistake, he sent liaisons and ordered the establishment of fusion cells to pool intelligence.¹⁶²

After learning from his mistake in Fallujah, General McChrystal stated that it became “standing guidance throughout the command” for any team working in conjunction with a conventional or intelligence partner that the “long-term relationship was more important than the immediate operation.”¹⁶³ He repeated the following maxim to his organization: “Credibility = Proven Competence + Integrity + Relationships.”¹⁶⁴ Nearing the end of his time in Iraq, General McChrystal commented that the “task force’s

experience across Iraq” was the “first all-of-military counterinsurgency fight in the war.”¹⁶⁵ According to General McChrystal, “TF 714 was now heavily partnered with conventional forces and other government agencies. Our network enabled us to see and understand the broader situation rapidly, and our intentionally decentralized culture allowed us to act rapidly.”¹⁶⁶

Analysis

“It takes a network to defeat a network” and it requires an empathetic mindset capable of establishing the good rapport necessary to make it possible.¹⁶⁷ General McChrystal’s ability to influence rapport building significantly impacted the building of cohesive teams through mutual trust in Iraq among all unified action partners. According to ADRP 3-0, unified action partners “are those military forces, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and elements of the private sector with whom Army forces plan, coordinate, synchronize, and integrate with during the conduct of operations.”¹⁶⁸ To influence the mission command principle of building teams through mutual trust, commanders must expend “significant effort” to “overcome differences in culture, mandates, and organizational capabilities.”¹⁶⁹ General McChrystal accomplished this by making an effort to build special and conventional force relationships through the use of liaisons and fusion cells in order to create an all-military counterinsurgency fight. Like the first JIATF in Afghanistan, the Situational Awareness Room brought people from disparate organizations under one roof. This effectively reduced the empathy gap between different people which resulted in the formation of bonds of trust.

General McChrystal’s approach to trust building and shared understanding was rooted in his ability to consider other points of view and involved three efforts. The first

effort was the physical layout of the Situational Awareness Room itself. By removing walls and placing people from different organizations in close proximity, he understood that relationships and trust building would follow. The second effort was done through the creation of shared consciousness and transparency. General McChrystal understood that if he wanted to increase the participation of the unified partners, he was going to have to set the example. The primary method for achieving this was via the O&I brief. At the O&I, he ensured that he personally demonstrated his mandate that the organization “share more than they were comfortable with.”¹⁷⁰ This rich information was a major factor in building the O&I attendance to over seven thousand people. He also made conscious efforts to alleviate the fear and unease of the briefers through simple measures like using their first name and thanking them for their participation.¹⁷¹ Acknowledging the fear that his briefers no doubt felt when briefing such a diverse and senior audience, suggests an ability to show compassion when others are distressed. The third effort was his empathetic use of priming.

General McChrystal’s comments that chairing the O&I while wearing his combat uniform to garner greater effort from the force and support from Washington, demonstrate a mindset capable of leveraging environmental cues. As detailed in chapter 2, this psychological phenomenon is called priming. According to Trout, the exposure to certain environmental cues has the potential to unconsciously activate or prime a mental stereotype, which can influence the actions of an individual.¹⁷² His ability to leverage priming effects is also apparent in his decision to arrange Spartan workspaces and the choice of his own personal accommodations. General McChrystal carefully and purposefully fashioned these cues in order to elicit a desired behavior; in this case,

greater dedication to fighting the war.¹⁷³ These behavioral insights of both his personnel and unified action partners were only possible as a result of an empathetic mindset that could appreciate how others would react in certain situations.

The effectiveness of the Balad hub was made greater by General McChrystal's empathetic mindset. His read of his own TF 714's insular tendencies and the bureaucratic fears of unified action partners like the National Security Agency, allowed him to make participation in the network's mission more appealing. In doing so, he influenced the mission command principles of building cohesive teams through mutual trust and shared understanding. An example of this is how General McChrystal solved the problems referred by members of his task force as "blinks."¹⁷⁴ Correctly understanding the fears of his intelligence partners, in order to identify choke points required that TF 714 empathize with their partners.¹⁷⁵ A lesson to glean from General McChrystal's blink example is that the solution to problems involving people are not necessarily a question of updating bureaucratic intelligence sharing guidelines or questions of rank. Oftentimes, even complex problems of a technical matter can be ameliorated by understanding how human relationships are formed and cultivated. One can imagine that a commander without the ability to take another's perspective, unable to empathize, will struggle to solve blinks with unified action partners in the future OE.

General McChrystal found that the role of a senior leader was that of "an empathetic crafter of culture" rather than a "controlling puppet master."¹⁷⁶ He provided clear commander's intent and personally reinforced the maxim through his own actions of "Credibility = Proven Competence + Integrity + Relationships."¹⁷⁷ His focus on relationships was informed by a strong empathetic mindset. This directly improved the

execution of mission command within TF 714. In General McChrystal's words, "Our network enabled us to see and understand the broader situation rapidly, and our intentional decentralized culture allowed us to act rapidly."¹⁷⁸

Vignette 7: The Death of Zarqawi

It was in May of 2004 when General McChrystal first viewed the execution video of Nicholas Berg, an American telephone tower technician.¹⁷⁹ Berg had traveled to Iraq to begin repair work that spring, only to be kidnapped by insurgents.¹⁸⁰ In the video, a figure believed to be Zarqawi, used a long knife to behead the shackled Berg. General McChrystal commented that "by virtue of our close-quarters fight with Al Qaeda, our forces began to see a lot of these videos."¹⁸¹ After having had to "consciously relax my clenched hands," General McChrystal reflected that "war drives strong emotions."¹⁸² In the past, he believed that American outrage over actions taken by the enemy, not unlike Berg's murder, had led to ignominious actions by US forces.¹⁸³ General McChrystal stated, as a result of the enemy propaganda videos, that he "sought to emphasize in my force, and in myself, the necessary discipline to fight enemies whose very tactic was to instill terror and incite indignation" so as to maintain the force's "moral compass."¹⁸⁴ In the end, Zarqawi's murder of Nick Berg made the task force, "more resolute, more serious."¹⁸⁵

General McChrystal implemented several key procedures to maintain the TF 714's moral compass while waging war against an enemy, who led by Zarqawi, showed no restraint. The first was the use of "painstaking analysis" to estimate the risk of death or injury to noncombatants when planning every air strike.¹⁸⁶ According to General McChrystal, this analysis "underscored" the "deeply human desire within my force to

avoid hurting innocents.”¹⁸⁷ Funerals, even if “all the attendees were likely only militants” were never bombed or raided.¹⁸⁸ This was because there “were usually too many civilians present” but even when there were not any, it was “important as a force to set limits.”¹⁸⁹ An additional key procedure concerned how TF 714 conducted detainee operations.

The Abu Ghraib scandal, which broke on 28 April 2004, “represented a devastating setback for America’s effort in Iraq” but also partly set the conditions that would lead to Zarqawi’s downfall.¹⁹⁰ Detainee operations and interrogations were vital to TF 714 because they could “reveal not just what the enemy thinks but *how* he thinks and *why*[original emphasis].”¹⁹¹ General McChrystal knew that the nature of his Iraqi operations made the force “vulnerable to misperceptions” and that some reported that the force’s detainee operations “constituted black prisons in which commanders ordered the mistreatment of prisoners.”¹⁹² General McChrystal wrote that, this was not the case under his or his predecessors command.¹⁹³

General McChrystal restructured the “facilities, standards, and leadership, and most important, the mindset of the force” to ensure that “sensitive operations, like handling detainees” were done correctly.¹⁹⁴ General McChrystal stated when speaking to his staff about detainee operations, “This is our Achilles’ heel, if we don’t do this right we’ll be taken off the battlefield.”¹⁹⁵ He emphasized to TF 714, “If you screw up, you will be punished . . . we won’t protect our own.”¹⁹⁶ Doing things correctly also meant that the screening facility was “clean and sterile, with cells, offices, and interrogation booths inside a building with aluminum paneling, glossed cement floors, and high ceilings.”¹⁹⁷ The facility was also as “transparent as possible” in order to encourage interagency

partnership and accountability.¹⁹⁸ This transparency meant that the capture and interrogation of a detainee leveraged expertise not just from TF 714, but across the entire counterintelligence community.¹⁹⁹

By August of 2006, TF 714 had conducted hundreds of raids against Al Qaeda in Iraq.²⁰⁰ General McChrystal believed that as a result of these raids the TF was closing in on Zarqawi.²⁰¹ TF 714 was trying a variety of methods to provoke Zarqawi and his associates into making a mistake that would betray his position.²⁰² One such method included reducing the reward offered for information on Zarqawi while simultaneously raising the amount for other senior Al Qaeda leaders.²⁰³ TF 714 also released a video taken by Zarqawi showing him operating an automatic weapon.²⁰⁴ In the intercepted and subsequently released unedited version, the “supposedly pious” Zarqawi ignored a call to prayer and one of his aides grabbed the hot barrel of the weapon, which seared his hand.²⁰⁵ “From my assessment of Zarqawi,” General McChrystal commented, “any diminution of his status would sorely upset him.”²⁰⁶

On October 17, Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden and Zarqawi’s group officially became known as Al Qaeda in Iraq.²⁰⁷ According to General McChrystal, Zarqawi “was quickly eclipsing Al Qaeda’s patriarchs as the most active, violent, energetic commander of jihad” and was one of the TF 714’s most wanted men.²⁰⁸ Zarqawi sought to “make Iraq the seat of a resuscitated caliphate, governed by the puritan formulation of Islamic law.”²⁰⁹ To that end, General McChrystal remarked that Zarqawi “deftly managed alliances and eventually co-opted local insurgent celebrity leaders” in places like Fallujah.²¹⁰ “On some level,” General McChrystal commented, “I admired Zarqawi’s cunning.”²¹¹

On 6 January 2006, Iraqi forces captured a man named Abu Zar who was Al Qaeda in Iraq's second-in-command.²¹² Abu Zar was transferred to the TF 714 screening facility which after "eighteen months of relentless focus" was now a "truly professional operation."²¹³ Abu Zar's relationship with Zarqawi went back to 1999 when the two men met in Afghanistan.²¹⁴ The interrogation of Abu Zar revealed valuable information over the course of several months, which eventually led to Zarqawi's death.²¹⁵

On 7 June 2006, a coalition GBU-12 bomb destroyed an Al Qaeda safe house near Hibhib, Iraq, a small rural area north of Baghdad.²¹⁶ Inside the two-story house was Zarqawi, who was fatally injured in the blast.²¹⁷ The location of the safe house had been determined by maintaining continuous surveillance of Sheikh Abd al-Rahman, the man believed to be Zarqawi's spiritual advisor by TF 714 assets.²¹⁸ The identity of Sheikh Abd al-Rahman had been determined after months of dedicated interrogation by TF 714 members detained as a result of Abu Zar's capture.²¹⁹ Later when Zarqawi's body was brought back to the task force headquarters, General McChrystal stated, "I looked back at the body. Seeing him as a man, I couldn't exult in his death. Nor did I wring my hands. I took satisfaction, standing there, knowing that this work, our work, was necessary."²²⁰ In the end, General McChrystal commented Zarqawi's death was "more than symbolically important."²²¹ Zarqawi was a "peculiar leader" whose "mix of charisma, brutality, and clear-eyed persistence was never matched" by his successors.²²²

Analysis

It would have been too easy to fall into the trap set by Zarqawi of dehumanizing enemy combatants as a result of viewing the murder of Nicholas Berg. General McChrystal ably avoided this trap because of his empathetic mindset. He never lost sight

of the discipline necessary to “fight enemies whose very tactic was to instill terror and incite indignation.”²²³ General McChrystal demonstrated his understanding of the impacts of the cold-to-hot empathy gap with comments such as “for operators, risking their lives night after night, capturing insurgents was not a theoretical undertaking. A calculus that felt self-evident in a classroom in Connecticut was more difficult in blood-drenched Baghdad, when Zarqawi’s bombers were wreaking havoc on innocent civilians.”²²⁴ His ability to predict how members of TF 714 would react to the enemy propaganda and under hot state conditions ensured that he had outside strategies in place before an Abu Ghraib like event could happen within his own organization. These strategies included civilian death or injury risk assessments for every airstrike, prohibition of the targeting of funerals, and detainee operations directives.

General McChrystal’s directives further demonstrated that he understood how environmental cues impact the behavior of his subordinates. General McChrystal knew that even his clear intent regarding detainee operations conveyed in statements like “If you screw up, you will be punished . . . we won’t ‘protect our own’” was not enough.²²⁵ The appearance of the screening facility itself, with its “clean and sterile” cells and “glossed cement floors” was an important part of his strategy to achieve the transparency and accountability he desired.²²⁶ General McChrystal’s empathetic mindset enabled him to understand that designing the screening facility in a certain way primed the behavior in his subordinates, which reinforced the intent conveyed in his directives.

General McChrystal’s predilection against dehumanizing enemy combatants is apparent in statements where he dispassionately analyzes Zarqawi leadership. General McChrystal effectively reduced the empathy gap between himself, an American general,

and Zarqawi, a Jordanian-borne Jihadist leader, by considering Zarqawi's perspective. This is demonstrated by General McChrystal's comments that Zarqawi "deftly managed alliances" and that "on some level he admired his cunning."²²⁷ Even after Zarqawi's death, rather than celebrating, General McChrystal instead reacts by thinking "I looked back at the body. Seeing him as a man, I couldn't exult in his death."²²⁸ Contrast General McChrystal's reaction with Ambassador Bremer's declaration after Saddam Hussein's capture and it is easy to see how a person's empathetic mindset impacts their response to emotionally charged events.

Recall in chapter 2 that Shore posited that empathetic leaders can determine the measures an adversary is willing to employ by focusing their attention on their behaviors during periods he called pattern breaks.²²⁹ Shore, coined the term strategic empathy which he defined as the ability for a person to "think like their opponent" for the purpose of identifying what an enemy's future behavior will resemble.²³⁰ Pattern break behaviors are defined simply as deviations from an adversary's routine.²³¹ General McChrystal's empathetic mindset allowed him to consider Zarqawi's point of view and to then design potential pattern break operations against Zarqawi. These operations included reducing the reward offered for information on Zarqawi and the release of the unedited footage of Zarqawi ignoring the call to prayer in the automatic weapon firing video. While the reasoning that "any diminution of his status would sorely upset him" did not produce a pattern break that could be exploited to betray Zarqawi's position, it still demonstrates a leader who sought to better understand his adversary's possible weaknesses.²³²

General McChrystal's empathetic mindset during the pursuit and eventual death of Zarqawi impacted the execution of mission command within TF 714. His detainee

operations and civilian casualty directives demonstrated his commander's intent to maintain the force's moral compass so necessary in counterinsurgency war. General McChrystal designed the screening facilities to prime transparency and encourage interagency partnership, which had positive effects on the mission command principal of building cohesive teams through mutual trust. General McChrystal's predilection to understand an enemy, and not dehumanize him, led to an increase in the shared understanding within his organization. This enhanced understanding was a key factor in the ability of the young interrogators to gain the intelligence necessary to finally put an end to Zarqawi's reign of terror in Iraq.

Vignette 8: Afghanistan Initiatives

Within days of Zarqawi's death in August of 2006, Al Qaeda in Iraq announced his replacement.²³³ General McChrystal believed that it was a "trite reaction among some to point out that there were thousands of men ready to replace Zarqawi" because of his unique blend of attributes.²³⁴ Still, the reality was that even with the increased capability of TF 714, the number of insurgents far exceeded what the organization could realistically remove from the battlefield.²³⁵ For the remainder of General McChrystal's time in TF 714, reconciliation through partnership with the Force Strategic Engagement Cell would be a key effort.

The Force Strategic Engagement Cell served three purposes in regards to reducing the Sunni insurgency.²³⁶ Its first purpose was to convince captured insurgents that Coalition forces were not in Iraq to convert them to the Christian faith.²³⁷ Second, it sought to create fissures between the various Sunni insurgent organizations and Al Qaeda by trying to convince them that Al Qaeda showed a disregard and contempt for Iraqi

life.²³⁸ The third was to demonstrate that Al Qaeda's sectarian war played into the strategy of the Iranian-backed Shia militias, which meant that Sunnis risked potential massacre.²³⁹ The cell's greatest contribution was that it "worked to prevent a potential merger" of Sunni insurgent groups with Al Qaeda.²⁴⁰ Partnership with the cell was one of General McChrystal's last major efforts in Iraq.

Prior to leaving Iraq, General McChrystal reflected on the war that had "demanded relentless focus and a hardening of natural emotions."²⁴¹ The nature of the Iraq war had required him to "regularly reflect on what we were doing to keep myself moored to what I believed."²⁴² One such opportunity occurred in the spring of 2008 at the Balad Airfield.²⁴³ General McChrystal was irritable after "seeing the fast-food restaurants and electronics sales displays around the PX," which he "considered a serious distraction to the business at hand."²⁴⁴ It was in this mental state that a staff member asked General McChrystal if he was aware that a military working dog had been killed during a TF 714 raid the night before.²⁴⁵ General McChrystal recalled that he turned to the staff member and said, "Seven enemy were killed on that target last night. Seven humans. Are you telling me you're more concerned about the dog than the *people* [original emphasis] that died?"²⁴⁶ He then admonished the staff member saying, "Don't lose your humanity in this thing."²⁴⁷ For General McChrystal, "while some men [insurgents] showed an innate, unalloyed cruelty, many who ended up fanatical and dangerous had begun as misguided, gullible kids."²⁴⁸ For a commander who had spent the past four-year building TF 714 into one of the most lethal targeting organizations ever created, "that they [the insurgents] had to die was something to lament."²⁴⁹

On 3 June 2008, General McChrystal returned to the United States to report for duty as the director of the Joint Staff.²⁵⁰ He served in this position until he received notification that he was to take command of the war in Afghanistan. In June of 2009, General McChrystal, just one year after concluding his command of TF 714, boarded a plane and left for Afghanistan.²⁵¹

General McChrystal recounts that on arriving in Afghanistan that he “found a creeping, fatalistic pessimism, as though the fight were over, the effort failed.”²⁵² As the senior commander in Afghanistan, he implemented many new changes to combat that perception. These efforts included the creation of a three-star command to run the campaign; a nationwide assessment referred to as a “listening tour” to inform the campaign design process; the overhaul of detainee operations; the creation of a reconciliation cell; an increased emphasis on training Afghan forces; a shift in “how our troops thought about and engaged with the enemy and population.”²⁵³

Shifting how the troops thought started with changes at the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters building. He recollected seeing within the compound, “a landscaped garden area with picnic tables and gazebos, where ISAF staff relaxed with coffee. It seemed blatantly inappropriate given the austere and dangerous conditions our troops faced only a few miles away.”²⁵⁴ In early September of 2009, General McChrystal took action and had alcohol banned from being served at the headquarters’ numerous bars.²⁵⁵ He never succeeded in having the coffee garden removed.²⁵⁶ In another effort to shift thought, General McChrystal made the decision to not personally carry a weapon, wear sunglasses, or wear body armor.²⁵⁷ As a living “symbol,” the “unadorned way” he presented himself was necessary in Afghanistan

owing to the need to “appear humble and aware of our status not as occupiers, but as guests.”²⁵⁸ To be “hidden by body armor” would make the “whole Coalition look scared, even as we were trying to convince the Afghans that the Taliban were not to be feared.”²⁵⁹ “More than anything else,” General McChrystal reflected, “this was a war of perception and confidence.”²⁶⁰

General McChrystal continued to emphasize the necessity in reducing civilian casualties in Afghanistan. This effort began with testimony delivered to the Senate Armed Services Committee, where he stated that “our willingness to operate in ways that minimize casualties or damage, even when doing so makes our task more difficult, is essential to our credibility.”²⁶¹ He reinforced this message to his organization through the use of forums similar to the TF 714 O&I.²⁶² During one such session, he slammed a table after a briefer was unable to explain two recent civilian casualty incidents.²⁶³ “What is it that we don’t understand,” said General McChrystal to the assembled group, “we’re going to lose this fucking war if we don’t stop killing civilians.”²⁶⁴ This statement was informed by his listening tour experiences, which “confirmed my conclusion” that the Afghans believed in “the exacting omnipotence” of US bombing.²⁶⁵ This belief made it difficult for Afghans to believe that civilian casualties caused as result of an airstrike could be accidents.²⁶⁶

To further combat civilian casualties, General McChrystal implemented several policies. The first was his policy of “courageous restraint.”²⁶⁷ Courageous restraint meant “foregoing fires, particularly artillery and air strikes, when civilian casualties were likely.”²⁶⁸ In a tactical directive and using “nonlawyerly language,” he wrote, “I expect leaders at all levels to scrutinize and limit the use of force like close air support against

residential compounds.”²⁶⁹ This was necessary because “every time we killed or maimed civilians, it not only made us more unwelcome but it corroded the government’s reputation.”²⁷⁰ After serious civilian casualty events, General McChrystal distributed statements of sympathy and apologies for broadcast on local television stations.²⁷¹ He responded immediately to these incidents, because any delay would have implied “sluggishness in acknowledging their [the Afghan population’s] loss” which would be taken as a sign of disrespect by the population.²⁷² An additional policy was created in response to General McChrystal’s belief that subordinates “performed according to what was measured and scrutinized.”²⁷³ He directed that the number of insurgents killed no longer be reported so as to “take away any incentives that might drive commanders and their men to see killing insurgents as the primary goal.”²⁷⁴ From then on, ISAF’s strategy would shift from pursuing insurgents to protecting the people from all threats, to include collateral violence.²⁷⁵

General McChrystal’s situational understanding of the Afghan population was greatly informed by his listening tour because it allowed him to “hear directly from Afghans and ISAF personnel.”²⁷⁶ General McChrystal believed that “commanders too often relied on traditional intelligence reports and focused on metrics such as insurgents killed and levels of violence.”²⁷⁷ Deeper understanding, however, required “accurately gauging the attitude of the people” to include “indicators of deviations from ‘normalcy.’”²⁷⁸ The goal of most Afghans was a life protected from “predations.”²⁷⁹ For General McChrystal, “understanding how the Afghans defined normal, and gauging whether they believed we were moving toward it” was the key to engaging them effectively.²⁸⁰

General McChrystal recounted during his tour across Afghanistan that by 2009 “ISAF and our civilian counterparts seemed disconnected from their [Afghans] lives, unwilling or unable to bridge the gap.”²⁸¹ At one stop, a group of Afghan elders informed General McChrystal that “Afghans hear with their eyes, not just with their ears.”²⁸² The listening tour team reported that they often “noted a persistent focus on force protection.”²⁸³ They also discovered that “few units appeared to take interaction with the population seriously.”²⁸⁴ This attitude resulted in units having “little idea what the ordinary Afghans were thinking.”²⁸⁵ In a war whose success would be determined by “those Afghans’ decisions to side with either the government or the Taliban,” the actions of coalition forces had engendered mistrust.²⁸⁶ According to one group of elders, “the government robs us, the Taliban beat us, and ISAF bombs us . . . we do not support any side.”²⁸⁷ General McChrystal emphasized to his team, with no security, the Afghans’ behavior was “brutally rational,” and “exactly what we’d do in their position.”²⁸⁸ The listening tour strongly reinforced General McChrystal’s conclusion that “the focus on the enemy in Afghanistan had made little dent in the insurgency’s strength,” and that “we would win by making them [the Taliban] irrelevant by limiting their ability to influence the lives of Afghans, positively or negatively.”²⁸⁹

To increase engagement General McChrystal made the decision to “field a cadre of several hundred American military officers and non-commissioned officers” in a program called “Afghan Hands.”²⁹⁰ The participants were “trained in the languages, history, and cultures” of the area and engaged in the program for five years.²⁹¹ General McChrystal commented that despite “enthusiastic support” from the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, that the “military services’ reluctance to contribute personnel slowed

the program.”²⁹² This was not the first time General McChrystal had observed a lack of support for the war. While serving on the Joint Staff, General McChrystal commented that he had “grown frustrated by what I thought was an unserious national approach to the war.”²⁹³ As General McChrystal implemented his initiatives, he would face additional resistance from a variety of sources.

General McChrystal believed that at times, “reaching or making a decision was sometimes less critical than communicating it effectively.”²⁹⁴ He soon realized that his entire force was not receiving the logic that undergirded his initiatives. He noted that from some people, his decision to issue apologies to the Afghans after a civilian casualty incident, “symbolized the inherent contradictions in much of the Afghanistan war.”²⁹⁵ He also recognized the “frustrations” of Soldiers, who believed that at times the attitudes of the Afghans’ belied ungratefulness.²⁹⁶

It remained imperative for General McChrystal, however, that improving Afghan perceptions was critical to victory.²⁹⁷ In February 2010, General McChrystal received an email, which suggested that his message on the importance of perceptions was being communicated less effectively than he may have believed.²⁹⁸ The email from a squad leader, serving in the volatile Zhari district west of Kandahar, read: “I don’t believe you fully understand the situation we face in this district, and I think you should come down and see it up close.”²⁹⁹

General McChrystal flew to Zhari the next day, and met with the squad leader’s platoon.³⁰⁰ The platoon operated in “physical and human terrain,” which seemed to “resist the platoon’s best efforts.”³⁰¹ General McChrystal accompanied the platoon during a combat patrol during which he “listened to the young leader’s thoughts and got to know

members of his squad.”³⁰² To General McChrystal, the groves of cultivated fields were “almost a metaphor for these infantrymen’s war.”³⁰³ The Soldiers could only see their immediate surroundings, and “any progress that I [General McChrystal] could see from a wider view of Afghanistan was impossible to discern from their [the platoon’s] mud-walled world.”³⁰⁴ General McChrystal reflected that:

Like leaders before me, I was asking soldiers to believe in something their ground-level perspective denied them. I was asking them to believe in a strategy impossible to guarantee, and in progress that was hard to see, much less prove. They were asked to risk themselves to bring improvements that might take years to arise. Although war is a product and instrument of national policy, that reality feels distant and theoretical to the soldier leaning exhausted against a mud wall. As a commander, I was asking them to believe in me.³⁰⁵

One month later, General McChrystal got another email from the Zhari squad leader, this time informing him that his team leader had been killed near to where they had patrolled.³⁰⁶ On receipt of the email, General McChrystal stated that “he felt like he needed to see and listen to the platoon again,” and traveled back to the outpost.³⁰⁷ During the visit, questions from the Soldiers became “blunt and frank.”³⁰⁸ The men were “openly bitter over their loss and the seeming impossibility of their mission,” and asked what the war’s point was.³⁰⁹ General McChrystal stated that “I listened and we talked,” but that he “couldn’t solve the platoon’s problems that day, or curtail their mission. The district had to be secured.”³¹⁰ He remembered that “for many, I lacked the eloquence to assuage their concerns and could only explain the strategy they were a part of. I tried to show them I understood, and cared.”³¹¹

Analysis

According to General McChrystal, former CENTCOM commander John Abizaid believed that the “very presence of Americans in the country [Iraq] had instigated the

violence, providing a nationalistic insurgency with a *raison d'être*.”³¹² Owing to General McChrystal’s empathetic mindset, he found this belief “hard to dispute.”³¹³ After years of methodical targeting, General McChrystal took a risk and supported the Force Strategic Engagement Cell to augment a strategy that could not be won by lethal targeting alone. One could argue that the cell’s purpose was to build rapport with the Sunni detainees that had yet to fully align with Al Qaeda in Iraq. The cell demonstrated an ability to take the perspectives of the insurgents and reduce their anxiety concerning the US role in Iraq, particularly their fear that the coalition was there to convert them to the Christian faith. It also leveraged the insurgent’s fear of Shia retribution, and played on the Iraqi insurgents’ beliefs that they were being used at the expense of foreign ambition. In a sense, the cell’s purpose was to decrease the empathy gap between the Iraqi insurgents and the coalition forces while simultaneously increasing the gap between the Iraqi insurgent and Al Qaeda. Only deep insight, gleaned by an empathetic mindset, made the cell’s efforts possible.

General McChrystal took a great risk by working with the cell to release insurgents that had been acquired at a high cost by his own subordinates. According to ADRP 6-0, “prudent risk is a deliberate exposure to potential injury or loss when the commander judges the outcome in terms of mission accomplishment as worth the cost.”³¹⁴ When exercising mission command, leaders acknowledge that “opportunities come with risks,” and that “the willingness to accept risk is often the key to exposing enemy weaknesses. Commanders focus on creating opportunities rather than simply preventing defeat—even when preventing defeat appears safe.”³¹⁵ General McChrystal’s ability to empathize with the Sunni insurgents not aligned with Al Qaeda made it possible for him to accept the risk associated with the proposed releases. His empathetic mindset

was a critical factor that enabled TF 714 to seize an opportunity, which inhibited the consolidation of Al Qaeda's hold over the Iraqi insurgency.

General McChrystal's ability to empathize with the insurgency manifested itself in other ways as evidenced by his anger over his staff member's reaction to the death of a military working dog. General McChrystal understood that war resulted in a "hardening of natural emotions" which, if not kept in check, could lead to the dehumanization of the enemy or local population.³¹⁶ Admonishing his subordinate to not lose his humanity ensured that shared understanding was maintained. To not do so, would have been to ignore an indicator that his staff member was at risk for dehumanizing the enemy combatants, a belief contrary to General McChrystal's approach to solving the problems plaguing Iraq.

General McChrystal continued to develop and deepen the traits of his empathetic mindset while directing the war in Afghanistan. Like Iraq, with its fast-food restaurants distractions, he continued to demonstrate an acute awareness of the possible priming effects of the coalition living and working environments. This is clearly demonstrated by his decision to close the ISAF headquarters' bars and coffee garden, which he argued were "blatantly inappropriate given the austere and dangerous conditions our troops faced."³¹⁷ While General McChrystal does not state these areas were negatively impacting the efforts within the ISAF headquarters, one can infer that this was his belief. Some would argue that General McChrystal's decision to close the bars and eliminate the coffee garden is evidence of a callous leader. Recall, however, that according to Trout, as the number of perceived differences between two people increase, so does the empathy gap.³¹⁸ The wider the empathy gap, the more difficult it is for a person to understand

another.³¹⁹ In this light, General McChrystal's response to the ISAF Headquarters' comforts can be viewed as an empathetic action taken to reduce the differences between the staff organizing the war effort and the Soldiers fighting the war.

In addition to closing the empathy gap within his own organization, General McChrystal's listening tour within Afghanistan demonstrated his desire to close the gap between himself and the Afghan people as quickly as possible. His listening tour confirmed that the Afghan people's number one priority was security, and that they perceived US airstrikes as much as a threat as the Taliban. "More than anything else," General McChrystal reflected, "this was a war of perception and confidence."³²⁰ He reminded his staff, in an act of creating shared understanding, that the Afghan behavior was "brutally rational," and further demonstrated an ability to take the perspective of the civilian population with the follow-on comment that it was "exactly what we'd do in their position."³²¹

Recall from chapter 2 the concept of bounded rationality. According to Meadows, "bounded rationality means that people make quite reasonable decisions based on the information they have."³²² General McChrystal's brutally rational concept is very similar to the concept of bounded rationality. The Afghans' lack of trust and mercurial alliances makes perfect sense when viewed from the perspective of a person trapped in a situation where "the government robs us, the Taliban beat us, and ISAF bombs us . . . we do not support any side."³²³ Commanders who see behavior as following prescriptive models may see the lack of Afghan support as evidence of a dishonorable people, which in time may lead to the dehumanization of the local population. General McChrystal's mental

model of human behavior instead permitted him to reduce the empathy gap between himself and the local population.

The empathetic insights gained during the listening tour greatly informed his decision-making. This included his decision to not wear body armor, because he predicted that in doing so it would make the “whole coalition look scared” to the local population.³²⁴ Most importantly, however, was the impact it had on policies related to the reduction of civilian casualties. Some would argue that General McChrystal’s policy of courageous restraint and apologies to the Afghan population after a civilian casualty incident was evidence of a commander far removed by the realities of the Soldier fighting on the ground.

Michael Hastings quotes a former Special Forces operator in the *Rolling Stone* article, “The Runaway General,” “I would love to kick McChrystal in the nuts. His rules of engagement put soldiers’ lives in even greater danger. Every real soldier will tell you the same thing.”³²⁵ This is not unlike the reaction of the Zhari squad leader who questioned General McChrystal’s understanding of the war.³²⁶ General McChrystal’s visit to the outpost is an acknowledgement that he had to combat the frustration felt among the ranks as a result of the change in strategic direction. According to ADRP 6-0, when executing mission command, “a critical challenge for commanders” is “creating shared understanding of their operational environment, the operation’s purpose, problems, and approaches to solving them.”³²⁷ By seeing, visiting, listening, and talking with the Soldiers, General McChrystal displayed an ability to show compassion, ability to establish good rapport, and consider others’ points of view. This empathetic mindset directly influenced his effort to create shared understanding within the platoon and build

cohesive teams through mutual trust, though he acknowledges, “for many, I lacked the eloquence to assuage their concerns and could only explain the strategy they were a part of.”³²⁸

General McChrystal’s interaction with the Zhari platoon demonstrates the difficulty of creating shared understanding with Soldiers when attempting to link their actions on the ground to the national strategy. Despite General McChrystal’s extraordinary action of building personal relationships at the squad-level and the display of several empathy strength indicators, he was only partially successful in closing the empathy gap with his own soldiers. This vignette serves as a cautionary example of the challenges of addressing empathy gaps. General McChrystal’s shift in Afghanistan strategy from pursuing insurgents to protecting the people was a stunning instance of a morally courageous decision informed by a deep empathetic understanding of his own forces and the Afghan population. McChrystal’s policy of courageous restraint was an outside strategy to ensure that his forces did not corrode the Afghan government’s reputation. Once again, this example demonstrates that General McChrystal understood that in a hot state, Soldiers were apt to apply lethal fires at the expense of the civilian population.

General McChrystal also understood that any enemy killed-in-action metrics incentivized commander’s on the ground to over-apply lethal effects. An enemy centric approach that inflicts high civilian casualties widens the empathy gap by dehumanizing both combatants and the local population. To make the Taliban “irrelevant by limiting their ability to influence the lives of Afghans, positively or negatively,” engagement was necessary.³²⁹ He noted during the listening tour that few units interacted seriously with

the population and were primarily focused on protecting themselves. It was apparent that the differences between a counterinsurgent and an Afghan are so vast that even a policy such as courageous restraint was inadequate. Recognizing this, General McChrystal launched the Afghan Hands program, which like his civilian casualty reducing directives, faced resistance. These were not easy decisions for an Army Commander to make, but were necessary in order to protect the Afghan civilian population from all threats, to include those from coalition forces in hot states.

Vignette 9: Assessment And Resignation

In October 2009, it was “painfully obvious” to General McChrystal that the level of friction between Afghanistan and the United States was increasing.³³⁰ President Karzai had just won 55 percent of the vote for his reelection, but his campaign was marred by accusations of widespread fraud by an independent United Nations-backed monitor.³³¹ The monitor ordered a runoff election, which Karzai “reluctantly agreed too.”³³² The “indignation that Karzai felt” during this time period “was deep and permanent.”³³³ “The mistrust on both sides became a critical issue, further hindering the partnership between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Afghans and eroding confidence in the viability of the mission.”³³⁴ General McChrystal commented that “despite the controversy, and perhaps more so because of it,” he sought to further strengthen his relationship with Karzai.³³⁵ According to General McChrystal, he “increasingly understood the unique challenges of the physical and political environment” in which Karzai had to work.³³⁶ Karzai, notwithstanding his “flaws,” was essential to maximizing the effectiveness of the “partnership to which NATO, America, and Afghanistan had committed” to.³³⁷ “Despite his [Karzai’s] often one-dimensional depiction in the media”

Karzai was “gifted at retail politics” and “his ability to communicate” coupled with his “natural empathy” seemed to resonate with his countrymen.³³⁸ General McChrystal soon discovered that this attitude was not shared across the US government.

After completing his listening tour, General McChrystal concluded, in a sixty-page war assessment of the war up to that point, that further under-resourcing would result in failure.³³⁹ He later argued that counterinsurgency doctrine required additional forces and requested that President Obama authorize an additional forty thousand Coalition forces to fulfill a gap in Afghan capability until security forces could assume greater responsibility.³⁴⁰

In October of 2009, General McChrystal received a “serious wake-up call” from Chairman Mullen over comments he had made to a reporter.³⁴¹ The reporter “had asked whether I [General McChrystal] felt a more limited counterterrorism-CT [counterterrorism]-only-strategy was viable for Afghanistan.”³⁴² General McChrystal replied that in his estimation a “more holistic effort than a counterterrorism capture-and-kill campaign” was required.³⁴³ Earlier, Vice President Biden had suggested a possible shift to a counterterrorism approach, and General McChrystal’s comments were “reported as a rebuttal” and a “criticism of the Vice President’s views.”³⁴⁴ General McChrystal stated that this was not his intent, and that he “was not thinking of him [Vice President Biden] in my answer.”³⁴⁵ He reflected that he “should have better understood that the president’s review process . . . was not just evaluating my strategy and force request to accomplish the counterinsurgency mission but was reevaluating the mission itself.”³⁴⁶

After the “unexpected storm raised” by his comments to the reporter, General McChrystal reflected that “I recognized, perhaps too slowly, the extent to which politics,

personalities, and other factors would complicate a course that, under the best of circumstances, would be remarkably difficult to navigate.”³⁴⁷ In November, Karl Eikenberry, then serving as the US Ambassador to Afghanistan, criticized General McChrystal’s assessment and recommendation for troop increases in a series of diplomatic cables.³⁴⁸ The cables, which were leaked to the press, called into question the efficacy of a counterinsurgency approach, the ability of the Afghan government to maintain security, and even President Karzai’s own commitment.³⁴⁹ General McChrystal did not directly comment of Karzai’s reaction to the cables, but instead reflected that “the partnership that we had with Afghanistan collectively—its government, its security forces, and most important, its people—would drive our success or failure.”³⁵⁰

On 2 December, President Obama announced that an additional thirty-thousand troops would be sent to Afghanistan to reverse the momentum of the Taliban.³⁵¹ At the start of the 2010 campaign, General McChrystal asked, “What psychic effect among Afghans we could produce through material gains. Would Afghanistan *feel* [original emphasis] the addition of troops . . . would such turns in feeling be large enough, and happen fast enough?”³⁵² For people in Washington, the additional troops created “expectations difficult to satisfy with the often glacial speed of counterinsurgency.”³⁵³ General McChrystal commented that he “should have worked harder to tamp down unrealistic expectations of how quickly and dramatically we’d see progress.”³⁵⁴

Not long after the election controversy, President Karzai further strained the relationship between himself and the White House. Karzai reportedly stated that “if pushed too far by the United States, he would join the Taliban.”³⁵⁵ These comments came out one month before a planned visit by Karzai to the United States and “the White

House indicated that his remarks put that trip in jeopardy.”³⁵⁶ General McChrystal stated that he “was bothered by his comments” which “were dispiriting to my soldiers fighting to sustain his government.”³⁵⁷ General McChrystal reported that he “questioned whether I was too respectful of him [Karzai]” and “whether I’d gone native.”³⁵⁸ Owing to the “relationship we’d built,” General McChrystal believed that Karzai’s actions spoke louder than his words spoken “during moments of fatigue and sadness.”³⁵⁹ General McChrystal cited Karzai’s positive actions as permitting the increase in precision targeting, agreeing to the proposed increase in Coalition troop numbers, and increasing his visitation to multiple locations throughout Afghanistan.³⁶⁰ General McChrystal assessed that Karzai was willing to make “tough concessions for a partnership that was badly stressed by missteps on both sides.”³⁶¹

On 22 June 2010, at 2:00 AM, General McChrystal was awoken.³⁶² He was informed that a Rolling Stone article had been published entitled, “The Runaway General.”³⁶³ The article was the work of Michael Hastings, a reporter who had interacted with General McChrystal and members of his staff during the previous few months.³⁶⁴ From General McChrystal’s perspective, “the article described a hard-driving general, a struggling U.S. policy, and attributed a number of unacceptable comments to my command team.”³⁶⁵

In the article, Hastings commented that after being “in charge of the war for only a year, in that short time he [General McChrystal] has managed to piss off almost everyone with a stake in the conflict.”³⁶⁶ Prior to an important political conference in Paris, Hasting stated that “McChrystal wonders aloud what Biden question he might get today, and how he should respond.”³⁶⁷ To this, a top advisor stated “Biden? Did you say:

Bite Me?”³⁶⁸ The night before Paris, Hastings states that General McChrystal invited his staff to dinner at the “least Gucci place” they could find, “though it is his and Annie’s [General McChrystal’s wife] 33rd anniversary.”³⁶⁹ According to Hastings, Annie, who traveled to Paris to take a rare opportunity to visit her husband, “had seen her husband less than 30 days a year” since the Iraq War began in 2003.³⁷⁰

Hastings reported that General McChrystal set “a manic pace for his staff, becoming legendary for sleeping four hours a night, running seven miles each morning and eating one meal a day.”³⁷¹ In regards to his relationship with Karl Eikenberry, the US ambassador, Hastings reported that “according to those close to the two men,” General McChrystal made Eikenberry “furious” by blocking his ascension to “the pivotal role of viceroy.”³⁷² According to Hastings, General McChrystal blocked the move because it “effectively increased McChrystal’s influence over diplomacy by shutting out a powerful rival.”³⁷³ Hastings also argued that “the most striking example of McChrystal’s usurpation of diplomatic policy is his handling of Karzai.”³⁷⁴ Hastings stated that “the doctrine of counterinsurgency requires a credible government, and since Karzai is not considered credible by his own people, McChrystal has worked hard to make him so.”³⁷⁵

The impacts of the article were swift and decisive for General McChrystal. The next day, he was ordered to fly to Washington for meetings with the Secretary of Defense and the President.³⁷⁶ General McChrystal stated his resignation was accepted during a “short, professional meeting with President Obama.”³⁷⁷ In April 2011, investigators from the Department of Defense concluded that no violations could be substantiated, and that Hastings did not portray all of the events in his article accurately.³⁷⁸ General McChrystal stated that while the conclusions of the investigators were important to him, “maybe more

important, also that month, I would accept First Lady Michelle Obama's request to serve my country again, this time on the board of advisers for Joining Forces, a White House initiative for service members and their families.”³⁷⁹

Analysis

This vignette adds further evidence as to the difficulty of closing empathy gaps. As the empathy gap widened between President Karzai and the White House, General McChrystal further strengthened his relationship with Karzai. His decision to do so, at the expense of appearing to have gone native, demonstrates several empathy strength indicators. First, this example demonstrates an ability to show compassion with Karzai. For General McChrystal, Karzai's statement “if pushed too far by the United States, he would join the Taliban” was a result of being in a hot state due to the recent election controversy.³⁸⁰ Second, his empathetic mindset, which allowed him to see past Karzai's comments, enabled General McChrystal to build greater rapport with Karzai and to appreciate his more favorable attributes. This course of action positively influenced the execution of mission command by building a more cohesive team through mutual trust between Coalition forces and the Afghan Government. General McChrystal's rapport building with Karzai resulted in favorable outcomes to the ISAF operations. These included greater precision targeting and Afghan approval of troop increases, both of which General McChrystal believed were necessary for success.³⁸¹

Interestingly, it appears that as General McChrystal reduced the empathy gap between himself and President Karzai and the Afghan population, he increased the empathy gap between himself and senior US policy leaders. This is not unlike the case in Vignette 7, where his courageous restraint policy and efforts to close the ISAF

headquarters' bar and coffee area likely increased the perceived differences between the General and his subordinates. In retrospect, General McChrystal acknowledged his lack of understanding of the political purposes behind the President's review processes, and his failure to "tamp down unrealistic expectations" for his counterinsurgency strategy.³⁸² His inability to take the perspective of people like the President and Vice President is a display of an empathy need indicator that led to serious consequences, to include his resignation. His inability to see the perspective of his leaders is in stark contrast to his ability to take the perspective of Karzai and the Afghan people as demonstrated in his continued partnership and comments concerning the "psychic effect among Afghans" that his new strategy would produce.³⁸³

Hastings article, whose most serious allegations were debunked by the Department of Defense investigation, is from the lens of an individual far removed culturally from General McChrystal.³⁸⁴ The number of perceived differences between the two men created a wide empathy gap, which one could argue led to Hastings' negative portrayal of General McChrystal. Unlike General McChrystal's belief that Karzai's actions spoke louder than his words, Hastings focused his efforts on a few inappropriate comments made by staff members.

Hastings did not analyze General McChrystal's logic in shifting to a counterinsurgency as opposed to a counterterrorism strategy. His criticism of General McChrystal's desire to eat at the "least Gucci place," and criticism of his apparent severe lifestyle misses the point that the General was acutely aware of priming effects, to include those that could negatively influence him.³⁸⁵ General McChrystal's lifestyle, which according to Hastings resulted in such derisive things as seeing his wife for "30

days a year” and only sleeping for four hours a night, do not make much sense to a magazine reporter.³⁸⁶ Nor, upon first examination, do the efforts of a four-star general to close down a coffee garden make much sense to an ISAF staff officer. General McChrystal’s decisions only make sense when one considers priming effects and empathy gaps. Through that lens, what one finds are the titanic efforts of an individual determined to carry out a counterinsurgency while not losing sight of the Soldier’s “mud-walled world.”³⁸⁷

General McChrystal Case Study Conclusion

As the preceding vignettes demonstrate, General McChrystal’s empathetic mindset contributed greatly to the achievement of favorable mission outcomes. This was a result of the positive influence exerted by his empathetic mindset on the execution of mission command within his organizations. Recall from chapter 2, that the Beyond People Skills Module lists the positive mission impacts of understanding others, which are “improves judgement and decision making; improves effectiveness of leader development; and helps identify, address, and improve Soldier well-being.”³⁸⁸ In chapter 2, the leader development impact was modified to team-member development and Soldier well-being impact to just well-being.

General McChrystal’s empathetic mindset improved his ability to execute mission command, and this led to positive mission impacts in all three areas during his command of TF 714. In the first vignette, “Assuming Command of Task Force 714,” General McChrystal’s initial rapport building with his operators influenced his decision to establish the JIATF. In Vignette 2, “Knowing the Enemy,” rather than blaming his teams for the lack of success in Mosul, he identified what the team needed were more assets.

This led him to implement the new intelligence handling procedures listed in vignette three, “Intelligence Handling,” which developed both his operators and analysts. In Vignette 4, “Establishing the Joint Interagency Task Force,” the JIATF resulted in extensive team member and unified action partner development. In Vignette 5, “The Rise of Zarqawi,” General McChrystal’s ability to empathize with the insurgent forces enhanced his judgement as to the nature of the sectarian strife then plaguing Iraq. In Vignette 6, “Networked,” his understanding of his team members and unified action partners resulted in the decision to construct the Situational Awareness Room and to implement the O&I. In Vignette 8, “The Death of Zarqawi,” his understanding of the range of behaviors possible during hot states led to directives that may have prevented an Abu Ghraib like event within TF 714 and the reduction of civilian casualties. This had the added benefit of enhancing detainee and civilian well-being in the process. His team development efforts were also a significant factor in the mission that led to Zarqawi’s death.

General McChrystal’s empathetic mindset continued to develop during his command of the war effort in Afghanistan, which led to additional mission impacts. In Vignette 8, “Afghanistan Initiatives,” he executed a listening tour to empathize with his organization, unified action partners, and the Afghan population. The insights gained during this tour led to his decisions to implement his courageous restraint policy and a shift to a counterinsurgency strategy. This shift in focus provided significant development opportunities for his subordinates and partners. The focus on reducing civilian casualties had positive influences on the well-being of the Afghan population. In Vignette 9, “Assessment and Resignation,” General McChrystal’s empathetic read of the growing

friction between Karzai and the White House influenced his decision to strengthen his relationship with the Afghan president. This decision resulted in positive benefits for the coalition to include Afghan agreement to the precision raids and troop increases. Ultimately, General McChrystal's inability to see the point of view of senior political leaders was a factor, which led to his resignation.

These vignettes demonstrate that General McChrystal often sought ways to present the enemy with multiple dilemmas. Recall from chapter 2, that the Army Operating Concept states that the key to a "strategic win" to "present the enemy with multiple dilemmas."³⁸⁹ While in command of TF 714, General McChrystal not only targeted Al Qaida in Iraq with lethal operations, he also supported psychological operations in the case of Zarqawi and reconciliation. In Afghanistan, General McChrystal undertook a series of initiatives to defeat the Taliban, to include a reduction in airstrike and indirect fires in order to reduce civilian casualties. In other words, General McChrystal was willing to forego a tactical win, killing a Taliban fighter at the risk of collateral damage, if it would erode his long-term strategy. The insights gained from his empathetic mindset made this possible. See figure 2 for a listing of how each General McChrystal vignette relates to the empathy indicators and principles of mission command.

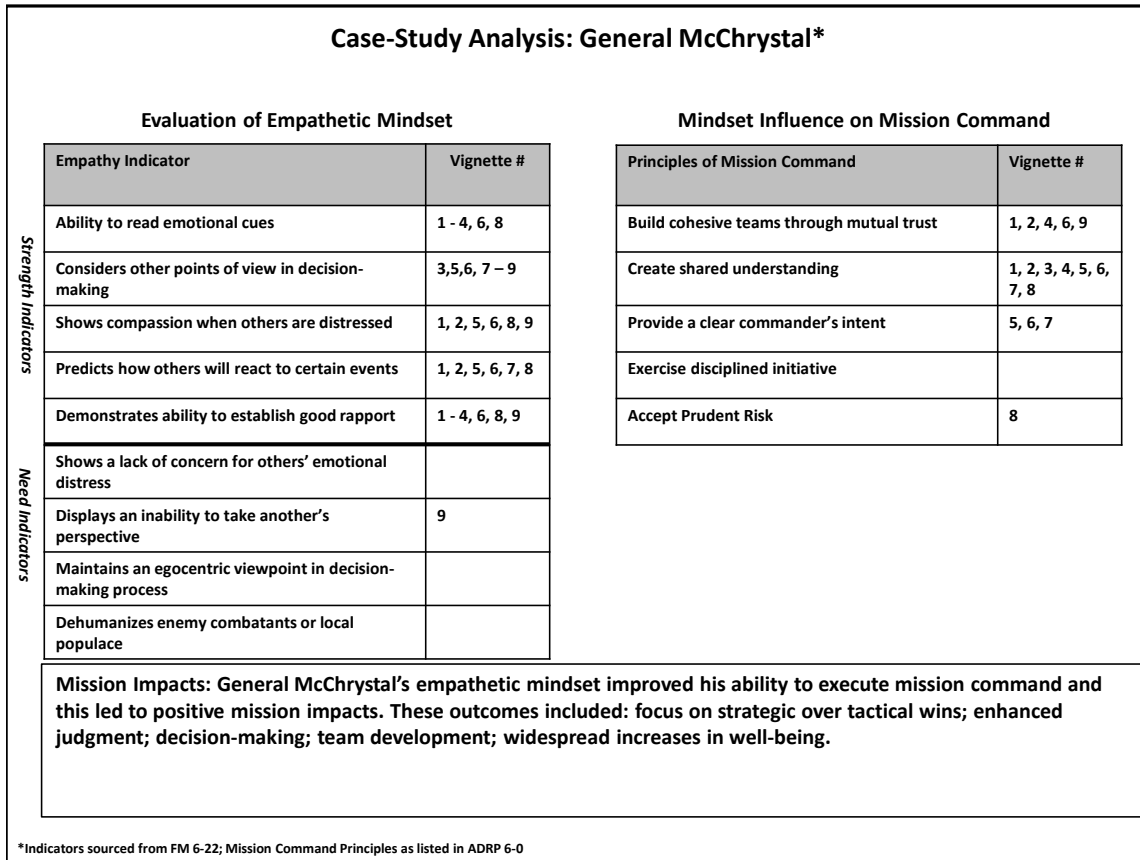


Figure 2. General McChrystal Case Study Analysis

Source: Created by author; model adapted from US Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Leader Development* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 7-17; US Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2012), 2-1.

Case Study 2: Colonel Michael Dane Steele

The second subject to be examined is Colonel Michael Dane Steele. Colonel Steele's case study is separated into two vignettes. The two vignettes cover selected situations, which occurred during Colonel Steele's command of 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Rakkasans) from approximately September 2005 to the execution of Operation Iron Triangle in May of 2006. The first vignette, "Pre-deployment

Speech” details a speech delivered by Colonel Steele to the assembled Rakkasans just prior to deploying. The second vignette, “Operation Iron Triangle” is an account of an operation, which resulted in the murder of three Iraqi detainees at the hands of Rakkasans soldiers. This case study concludes with a brief analysis as to the possible mission outcomes, which can be attributed to Colonel Steele’s empathetic mindset’s influence on mission command.

Vignette 10: Pre-Deployment Speech

Prior to deploying to Iraq on 18 September 2005, Colonel Steele delivered a fiery speech in an auditorium to toughen the Rakkasans for the experience that lay ahead.³⁹⁰ After a quick introduction, Colonel Steele told the Soldiers, “The Rakkasans are going to the worst spot in Iraq. That’s not something you droop your head down and say ‘Woe is me.’ That’s something you stick your chest out and say, ‘You’re damn right we’re going out there,’ because where we are going they couldn’t send a bunch of Girl Scouts and left-handed midgets to do what needs to be done. The old man didn’t have a choice, who else was he going to send? This is real. The guy that’s going to win on the far end is the one who gets violent the fastest.”³⁹¹ Through the audience’s laughter, Colonel Steele shuffled his notes and delivered a series of directives.

“Number one, anytime you fight, anytime you fight, you always kill the other son of a bitch. Always. Do not let him live today so he will fight you tomorrow. Kill him today. They will make more of them. They are everywhere.”³⁹² Colonel Steele’s next directive was made in regards to his view on detainee operations. Colonel Steele began by informing the assembly that, “unfortunately, in meetings,” he has “spent a bunch of his time” being subjected to the talk of “other guys.”³⁹³

They [the “guys”] say ‘well you know what you should do,’ as your walking in, ‘what you need to do, is we need to go over and kick the feet out from under them and flex-cuff them and bring them back and put them in a room and get some water because they’ll probably be dehydrated.’ And I’m thinking, well get them some food because they have not eaten well. Throw an arm around them, give them an open mouth kiss, tell them we love them. After we’ve befriended them, and they’re going to tell us all of this intelligence? Man that is bull shit.³⁹⁴

Colonel Steele stated that he had to “just kind of think it in and face out” when listening to this kind of talk so as not to “hyperventilate.”³⁹⁵ He informed the audience that this attitude toward detainee operations left him wanting to “whup somebody’s ass.”³⁹⁶

Colonel Steele then provided his troops with simple lethal force guidance. “So I want to be very clear, if you go out and somebody presents a lethal threat to you and you shoot him, do not feel bad and think that you should have brought him back, because I didn’t want to talk to him.”³⁹⁷ Colonel Steele paused amid the audience’s laughter before telling his Soldiers that anytime they left an operating base, he expected them to “look like a killer.”³⁹⁸ He stated, “I have been in more Third World countries than anybody in this room. And I tell ya most of them do not speak English, they all speak food chain. And from the time you set foot in their country they are checking you out top to bottom to figure out where you are in the food chain. If you look like prey . . . you get eaten.”³⁹⁹ Colonel Steel concluded his warning with, “You send the message: I am the dominant predator on this street.”⁴⁰⁰

Colonel Steele then tempered his lethal force and predator rhetoric with a clarification. “We are not going to be driving around Iraq raping, burning, pillaging, being undisciplined. That’s not what I’m talking about. I’m talking about the moment of truth when you’re about to kill the other son of a bitch. I do not want you to choke down

that pipe with thinking, ‘man that’s a pretty nice looking car you’re driving.’ Shoot the damn car.”⁴⁰¹

At this point in the speech, Colonel Steele turned to a podium and retrieved a folded American flag. “Four years and two days ago, this flag was hanging in Building Number Seven at the World Trade Center . . . This flag was where the fight started. I think it’s very appropriate that we take a piece of the World Trade Center back. We didn’t start it; we’re going to finish it.”⁴⁰² Colonel Steele then informed the men that this flag would accompany him to Iraq because he “wanted you [the Soldiers] to know what this flag means when you come to headquarters and you see it down there.”⁴⁰³ Still clutching the flag, Colonel Steele concluded his speech with, “Man it’s time to go hunting. And that’s exactly the attitude I expect you to have. Every time you walk out that gate, you are hunting. You are the hunter, you are the predator, you are looking for the prey. Rakkasans.”⁴⁰⁴

Analysis

Colonel Steele’s pre-deployment speech to the Rakkasans demonstrated a mix of several empathy strength and need indicators, which influenced the execution of mission command within the organization. While on the one hand, his words no doubt drew him closer to the anxious rank and file, Colonel Steele’s speech set the conditions for widening the empathy gap between members of the Rakkasans and other groups of people. Colonel Steele’s comment that the unit’s leadership had no other choice but to send the Rakkasans to the worst spot in Iraq, suggested to the troops that they were a unit apart from other brigade combat teams, and faced a unique situation. His remarks on detainee operations indicated that Colonel Steele was disdainful of his higher

headquarters' guidance. His statement that he wanted to whup the ass of guys (presumably staff officers or other commanders) during meetings suggest an inability to take another's perspective. He demonstrated an egocentric viewpoint by dismissing out of hand these unnamed individuals' so-called bullshit belief that a detainee held intelligence value. His assertion that he had more experience in Third World countries than anybody in this room, implied that this type of guidance was wishful thinking, which deserved derision. His remarks suggested that these individuals, unlike himself, were detached from his perceived reality of the real-world food chain of predator and prey.

In addition to increasing the empathy gap between the Rakkasans and other military organizations, Colonel Steele's speech dehumanized the Iraqi population and insurgent fighters. Labeling Iraq as a Third World nation set the population apart from the ordinary American Soldier. The empathy gap was further exacerbated by urging his men to send the message that they were the dominant predator to the population. He reemphasized this point later by stating that, "You are the hunter," and when on mission, the Soldiers were "looking for prey."⁴⁰⁵ His comments to look people dead in the eye and to have their weapon ready conveyed that impression that every Iraqi was a threat. For the enemy, Colonel Steel urged his men to always kill the "son of a bitch."⁴⁰⁶ He further debased Iraqi life by implying that their deaths had less value with the remark that they will make more of them.

One can argue that Colonel Steele's "food chain" metaphor and use of the World Trade Center flag was an attempt to prime the future actions of his subordinates.⁴⁰⁷ Recall from chapter 2 that the exposure to certain environmental cues has the potential to unconsciously activate or prime a mental stereotype, which can influence the actions of

an individual.⁴⁰⁸ Also recall that according to Grossman, the resistance to killing has been reduced in Soldiers via conditioning and stress inoculation.⁴⁰⁹ Colonel Steele was very knowledgeable with Grossman's work, *On Killing*.⁴¹⁰ So much so, that he designed the Rakkasans' training program to better enable Soldiers to overcome the hesitation common to many when confronted with a lethal threat.⁴¹¹ Classifying his Soldiers as "hunters" and "killers" while describing the Iraqis' as a "Third World" people, "prey," and "sons of bitches," likely primed a dangerous mix of mental stereotypes in the minds of his Soldiers.⁴¹² Displaying the World Trade Center flag in the headquarters was a powerful environmental cue with the potential to activate mental stereotypes against the Muslim population as well as engender feelings of anger and desire for revenge. Colonel Steele's views suggested that Iraqi society was completely distinct from the Soldier's own culture—a land of predator and prey. Hearing this guidance from an experienced commander would make it hard for any Soldier to build rapport with an Iraqi.

Remarkably, while Colonel Steele demonstrated strong empathy need indicators for those outside the Rakkasans, it is possible to argue that he demonstrated empathy strength indicators when it came to his Soldiers. One cannot dismiss Colonel Steele's real world combat and troop leading experience. Colonel Steele's simple maxims to react and to not hesitate when presented with a lethal threat demonstrated an ability to consider the actions of his inexperienced Soldiers in their first life or death situations. Colonel Steele no doubt understood that to choke or appear scared in a dangerous situation could result in the death of a Soldier or mission failure. His skillful use of priming, as demonstrated with the food chain metaphor and American flag display, suggest an ability to predict how others will react to certain events. It is clear that he believed his directives would increase

the likelihood of his own Soldiers returning home from Iraq. In this sense, one can argue that Colonel Steele demonstrated compassion for his Soldiers. His dismissal of detainee operations guidance, which he likely viewed as unrealistic, was no doubt an opinion held by other members of the Rakkasans—needless complications offered by desk officers far removed from the battlefield realities. Colonel Steele’s speech can be regarded as an effort to close the empathy gap between himself and his Soldiers at the expense of his understanding of all other parties.

Colonel Steele’s empathetic mindset both negatively and positively influenced the execution of mission command within the Rakkasans. His empathetic mindset negatively influenced the building of cohesive teams through mutual trust between the Rakkasans and other military organizations. According to ADRP 6-0, “Trust must flow throughout the chain of command.”⁴¹³ Telling the assembled brigade that he wanted to “whup the ass” of other people with a dissenting view of detainee operations violated this maxim.⁴¹⁴ Paradoxically, violating the trust of military personnel outside the Rakkasans may have endeared him to his own subordinates and affected the execution of mission command in other ways.

At first look, Colonel Steele’s ability to understand his Soldiers’ point of view, enabled him to deliver a clear and simple commander’s intent, “. . . any time you fight, you always kill the other son of a bitch.”⁴¹⁵ His commander’s intent was reinforced shortly later in the speech with the statement to his men not to “feel bad” if they “shoot somebody” that presents a lethal threat, “because I didn’t want to talk to him.”⁴¹⁶ Later in the speech, Colonel Steele seemed to become aware that he may have gone too far when he offered this single caveat that, “We are not going to be driving around Iraq, raping,

burning, and pillaging, being undisciplined. That's not what I'm talking about."⁴¹⁷ This single caveat seems out of place in a speech that is otherwise dedicated towards aggression, which may have left Soldiers in his audience asking themselves several questions as to what the Colonel meant by being undisciplined. Does killing somebody who could have otherwise been realistically detained constitute a disciplined or undisciplined action? If I always kill somebody when I fight, can the enemy surrender after presenting a lethal threat?

According to ADRP 6-0, leaders express their intent in order to "explain the broader purpose of the operation."⁴¹⁸ "Doing this allows subordinate commanders and Soldiers to gain insight into what is expected of them, and what constraints apply."⁴¹⁹ His inability to take the perspective of the Iraqi population, or to understand the possible actions that his Soldier's might take in a hot state, meant that he inadequately described the constraints that he sought to apply. Colonel Steele's intent as expressed in the redeployment speech left room for interpretation by his subordinates. The commander's intent, "defines the limits within which subordinates may exercise initiative."⁴²⁰ The effects of his empathetic mindset demonstrated in this speech would arguably have severe consequences on the future actions of his subordinates.

Vignette 11: Operation Iron Triangle

The Rakkasans executed operation Iron Triangle on 9 May 2006 near Samarra, Iraq.⁴²¹ The operation's purpose was to clear small islands on the edge of Lake Tharthar near what had once been a chemical weapons-complex during Saddam Hussein's reign.⁴²² Multiple intelligence reports indicated that the islands served as an Al Qaeda hideout, training area, and a crude chemical weapon development site.⁴²³ Two huts were

identified as being of specific interest during a helicopter reconnaissance of the area.⁴²⁴

An Iraqi informant, who participated in the aerial reconnaissance, was said to have “waved his hand over them, [the two huts] in a gesture that appeared to include the whole island. ‘All Zarqawi’s men,’ he said.”⁴²⁵ The two huts were codenamed Objective Murray.⁴²⁶

Just twenty-four hours before the start of Operation Iron Triangle, Colonel Steele requested airstrikes to destroy various structures on the islands.⁴²⁷ The intelligence concerning Objective Murray made Colonel Steele “feel certain that anyone there was a member of Al Qaeda.”⁴²⁸ The airstrike was denied by higher headquarters out of concerns that it “might disperse deadly chemicals.”⁴²⁹ According to Khatchadourian, Colonel Steele “inferred” that since the airstrike approval authority had not questioned his assertion that the huts contained only combatants, he “could declare everyone at the mud huts a ‘hostile target.’”⁴³⁰ Colonel Steele “concluded that initiating an attack on the two mud huts with his soldiers was a comparable act [to an airstrike], and that once the Rakkasans touched down anyone they encountered ‘could legally be engaged or destroyed.’”⁴³¹

According to one of the operations primary planners, “the R.O.E [rules of engagement] from the brigade commander on down was: Shoot all military-aged males on Objective Murray.”⁴³² Unfortunately, the leadership of Charlie Company, the ground force assigned to clear Objective Murray, believed the authorization to shoot any military-aged male extended to not just the two mud huts, but the entire island.⁴³³ Prior to the operation, Charlie Company had already earned a reputation for aggressive action. The company maintained a “kill board” which tallied the number of insurgent and

civilian deaths killed by members of the unit.⁴³⁴ “In the anxious hours before Operation Iron Triangle commenced,” some Charlie Company Soldiers recalled Colonel Steele telling them to “kill the sons of bitches” during the impending operation.⁴³⁵

In the early morning hours of 9 May, nearly seventy members of Charlie Company took off in helicopters and flew in the direction of the chemical weapons-complex near Lake Tharthar.⁴³⁶ By five in the morning, the company landed and assaulted Objective Murray with many firing their weapons into the mud huts as they ran towards them.⁴³⁷ Colonel Steele accompanied the assault force. The huts were abandoned, but an attack helicopter patrolling the area reported “a small motorboat racing away from the shore near the huts.”⁴³⁸ The Charlie Company commander ordered the Apaches to kill the fleeing men because “Steele had told his men to shoot anyone at Objective Murray who was fleeing across the river” since “militants in the area had used boats as escape vehicles before.”⁴³⁹ It was impossible to determine if the men were armed and their bodies were not recovered.⁴⁴⁰

With Objective Murray secured, Charlie Company split into smaller clearance teams and fanned out across the island.⁴⁴¹ Staff Sergeant Ray Girouard led one of the teams.⁴⁴² Prior to departing for the clearance, Girouard asked his platoon leader if the rules of engagement were still in effect. Girouard later testified that, “he [the platoon leader] said it still applied.”⁴⁴³ Within minutes, Girouard and his team were dropped near another house on the island.⁴⁴⁴ Girouard and his team fired into the window of the home “at a male, maybe a white sheet. It did not matter if he was armed or not. He was a military aged-male, and we were told to kill all military aged-males.”⁴⁴⁵ Upon entering the home, Girouard and his team found two teenage males, an older man, and two

women.⁴⁴⁶ The older man, aged seventy, was bleeding profusely, and died within minutes.⁴⁴⁷ In a nearby building, a third man was discovered.⁴⁴⁸ Girouard's squad detained all three males and he informed their platoon leader of what had taken place.⁴⁴⁹ When the report reached the Charlie Company command post, the company First Sergeant asked, "Why do I have three fucking detainees that should have been killed?"⁴⁵⁰

After reporting to higher, Girouard and his men searched the two residencies and found nothing suspicious.⁴⁵¹ With the search complete, Girouard assembled his men and told them that they would kill the three detainees.⁴⁵² The three men's restraints were cut and they were ordered to run.⁴⁵³ As they ran, two of Girouard's men shot and killed them.⁴⁵⁴ "Later that day, at the command center near Samarra, Steele examined the blindfolded bodies of the detainees and immediately ordered an investigation."⁴⁵⁵ By the end of 9 May, members of the Rakkasans had killed eight Iraqi men.⁴⁵⁶ The men were "all apparently unarmed, and that they [the Rakkasans] might have killed more had some soldiers not disobeyed a platoon leader's orders to gun down farmers digging in a field and men gathered near a gas station."⁴⁵⁷

In the aftermath of Operation Iron Triangle, Colonel Steele was issued a severe reprimand, which effectively ended his career.⁴⁵⁸ The reprimanding officer, General Chiarelli, believed that "Steele set the conditions for a massacre by cultivating reckless aggressiveness in his soldiers, and by interpreting the rules of engagement in a way that made the killing of noncombatants likely."⁴⁵⁹ Prior to this incident, General Chiarelli and Colonel Steele had already had several negative encounters. In one incident, when Chiarelli and a local Iraqi police commander visited Colonel Steele, "Steele wouldn't sit in the same car with the commander."⁴⁶⁰ General Chiarelli believed that a focus on

killing insurgents was hindering counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq, and instructed his subordinates to capture insurgents when possible.⁴⁶¹ He ordered compensation be paid to Iraqi families if US actions resulted in the death of a civilian, and ensured these incidents were investigated.⁴⁶² After a Rakkasans' airstrike on a hut resulted in the death of a pregnant Iraqi woman, the Rakkasans refused to find and compensate the woman's family despite General Chiarelli's staff's insistence that they do so.⁴⁶³ The Rakkasans staff seemingly refused because an enemy mortar team had been tracked to the house.⁴⁶⁴ General Chiarelli also directed that Soldier's use less aggressive approaches when entering Iraqi homes, and emphasized reconstruction projects along with security.⁴⁶⁵ According to Khatchadourian, General Chiarelli took this approach because he "wanted Iraqis to regard the Army as a just institution that was serving their interests."⁴⁶⁶

Colonel Steele instead favored aggressive tactics. His men "razed houses that had been harboring insurgents," and "disregarding Chiarelli's explicit guidance, Steele and his staff dramatically cut spending on local development projects that didn't directly relate to security."⁴⁶⁷ The motto that the Rakkasans embraced during their deployment was, "We give the enemy the maximum opportunity to give his life for his country."⁴⁶⁸ Colonel Steele's guidance to his subordinates was, "We will never cross the line, but we might get chalk all over our feet."⁴⁶⁹

Colonel Steele's conflict with Chiarelli was deeply rooted in his view as to how best to execute the Iraqi war.⁴⁷⁰ According to Khatchadourian, Operation Iron Triangle "emerged from a way of thinking and a set of tactics that were developed" when Colonel Steele took command of the Rakkasans.⁴⁷¹ Colonel Steele reportedly dismissed Iraqi language training and instead opted for increases in physical and marksmanship

training.⁴⁷² Colonel Steele sought M14 rifles, “which are more often used by Special Forces,” and sought to obtain more powerful .45s in lieu of the standard 9-mm pistol.⁴⁷³ When that effort failed, Colonel Steele “eventually borrowed others from Glock,” which he was later forced to return after deploying to Iraq.⁴⁷⁴ He sought to make his men adept at killing, but also referred to his Soldiers as “sheepdogs,” animals bred for protection.⁴⁷⁵ The Rakkasans engaged in “fighting tournaments” prior to deploying that devolved into brawls, which included officers fighting enlisted men and even broken bones.⁴⁷⁶ Colonel Steele issued a directive that the Rakkasans would not fire any warning shots to reduce the risk for his own Soldiers.⁴⁷⁷ Colonel Steele reportedly believed that these efforts would “counter a trend [one of placing “excessive nonmilitary burdens on soldiers”] within the Army which he believed was deeply misguided.”⁴⁷⁸

In the end, an Army investigation determined that three of the eight men killed that day were murdered.⁴⁷⁹ Girouard, along with the members of his team responsible for executing the three detainees, were convicted of a range of charges.⁴⁸⁰ “As part of their plea agreements, all of them stipulated that the rules of engagement were not a factor in the murder of the detainees.”⁴⁸¹ According to Khatchadourian, “despite their plea agreements, the three soldiers who are now imprisoned refuse to accept full culpability for their actions, and hope to share some blame with Steele.”⁴⁸² An Army investigation, referenced by Khatchadourian, into Colonel Steele’s role in the incident, cleared him of serious wrongdoing, but also acknowledged that he should have been clearer about the operation’s rules of engagement.⁴⁸³ The investigator reportedly said that “Steele had failed to consider a fundamental aspect of the Law of War: that even if a group of people in a geographic area can be legitimately targeted, combatants must be identified when the

means permit it. . . . In his zeal to protect his soldiers, Maffey [Investigating Officer Brigadier General Thomas Maffey] seemed to suggest, Steele had lost sight of their capacity for moral discrimination.”⁴⁸⁴

According to Khatchadourian, Colonel Steele rebutted General Chiarelli’s allegation that his “acts, omissions, and personal example have created a command climate where irresponsible behavior appears to have been allowed to go unchecked.”⁴⁸⁵ Colonel Steele believed that the restraint showed by his men in other actions was a truer reflection of the Rakkasans’ culture.⁴⁸⁶ An inquiry into the Rakkasans’ command climate quoted by Khatchadourian concluded that Colonel Steele’s often repeated guidance to not hesitate in the use of lethal force, left the possibility that some could misinterpret it.⁴⁸⁷ Despite this guidance, the inquiry determined that Colonel Steele had not encouraged illegal acts of killing.⁴⁸⁸

Analysis

This analysis will not attempt to establish a causal link between Colonel Steele’s rhetoric and the murders of the three detainees on 9 May 2006. Rather, it will explore how Colonel Steele’s empathetic mindset may have influenced the execution of mission command during Operation Iron Triangle. One of the key factors that might have led to the outcome of this operation was the interpretation of the rules of engagement. One can argue that Colonel Steele’s empathetic mindset greatly influenced how he, and his subordinates, interpreted the rules of engagement. This line of argument begins with Colonel Steele’s relationship with his higher headquarters.

It was apparent in Khatchadourian’s article that Colonel Steele and General Chiarelli had deep differences in their worldviews. General Chiarelli believed his

guidance would increase the likelihood that the Army would appear just to the population.⁴⁸⁹ To accomplish this aim, General Chiarelli emphasized reconstruction as much as security.⁴⁹⁰ Colonel Steele demonstrated an egocentric viewpoint and an inability to take another's perspective by ignoring General Chiarelli's directives to implement less aggressive tactics or to increase reconstruction projects. Colonel Steele's inability to take another's perspective was further demonstrated in his decision to not conduct cultural awareness training prior to deploying, his emphasis on killing rather than capturing insurgents, and his directive prohibiting warning shots. The reason he contradicted Army guidance was to counter the "deeply misguided" trend he believed he saw.⁴⁹¹ Colonel Steele's empathetic mindset had deleterious effects on the execution of mission command between General Chiarelli's headquarters and the Rakkasans. Colonel Steele seemed unwilling, or unable, to empathize with General Chiarelli's views and, therefore, could not see the value of his commander's intent.

While it is clear that Colonel Steele displayed an inability to take General Chiarelli's perspective, and those like him, his ability to take the perspective of his subordinates, the threat, and the population is far less clear. Colonel Steele's conditioning program demonstrated that he understood the behavior of Soldiers in stressful situations. He likely attempted to prime the behavior of his subordinates by seeking to arm them with deadlier pistols and the M14—a rifle then in use by the elite Special Forces operators responsible for high-profile personality driven raids. One can argue that his conditioning program seemed well suited to the realities of the Rakkasans' situation. Samarra was dangerous, and the threat was real. Eighteen Rakkasans were killed during the

deployment; “the brigades that preceded and replaced the Rakkasans each lost more than twice as many men.”⁴⁹²

Statistics can be misleading, and it is dangerous to draw inferences from them. It is entirely possible that Colonel Steele’s empathetic mindset, which led to the increase in aggression by the Rakkasans, resulted in a short-term threat reduction at the expense of follow-on units. It is also possible that strict adherence to General Chiarelli’s guidance may have further emboldened the insurgents. One telling comment from an Iraqi Soldier suggests that operations like Operation Iron Triangle engendered contempt among the population. The Iraqi Soldier, on the scene during Girouad’s clearance, testified during a military hearing that, “This incident makes the people, the citizens, hate us.”⁴⁹³

Colonel Steele’s guidance for Operation Iron Triangle, and his previous rhetoric, suggests that he was more focused on the destruction of insurgents than protecting the population or setting the conditions for engagement.⁴⁹⁴ Focusing on the threat likely reduced the Rakkasans’ ability to see the potential ramifications that aggressive operations would have on the population. In his reprimand of Colonel Steele, General Chiarelli provided support for this claim. General Chiarelli reportedly argued that the deaths of the unarmed men might not have happened had Colonel Steele first deliberated on the “second-and-third order effects.”⁴⁹⁵ Not considering the second-and-third order effects of lethal operations can lead to the dehumanization of the local population.

The Rakkasans staff’s decision not to compensate the pregnant Iraqi woman’s family reflects callousness towards Iraqi life. Recall from chapter 2 that an empathy gap may mislead us to blame the local population for insurgent activity or to hold innocent people responsible for bad outcomes when the population had no other viable choices.⁴⁹⁶

Also recall that according to Meadows, “blaming an individual” for making a decision under the conditions of bounded rationality, “rarely helps create a more desirable outcome.”⁴⁹⁷ In this instance, the Rakkasans’ staff felt no recompense was owed the woman’s family, effectively blaming her for the insurgents’ actions. This same effect was seen in his Soldier’s razing of homes belonging to suspected insurgents. The dehumanization of the combatants and local population was also clearly at play in Charlie Company’s “Kill Board” and the selection of the Rakkasans’ deployment motto.⁴⁹⁸ Most importantly however, was how his mindset affected lethal and detainee operations.

As in his pre-deployment speech, Colonel Steele referred to enemy combatants as “sons of bitches,” to include the night before the assault on Objective Murray.⁴⁹⁹ Referencing the enemy in this matter suggests that Colonel Steele had dehumanized these individuals. Whether it was his intention or not, Colonel Steele’s empathetic mindset also influenced how his organization viewed and executed detainee operations. His belief that detainees offered little intelligence value and his paramount concern for the safety of his own men was likely a factor, which led him to declare all military-aged males on Objective Murray as being combatants. This belief may have been a factor in Colonel Steele’s failure “to consider a fundamental aspect of the Law of War: that even if a group of people in a geographic area can be legitimately targeted, combatants must be individually identified when the means permit it.”⁵⁰⁰

Colonel Steele’s empathetic mindset seems to have been reflected in his subordinates’ actions and comments. While he stressed not crossing the line to his subordinates and specified that the Rakkasans would not be “undisciplined” some of his other actions weakened these statements.⁵⁰¹ These actions included his encouragement of

platoon brawls, which involved members of the chain of command and the willful circumvention of Army regulations by acquiring Glock pistols. It was also evident in his tacit approval of the helicopter attack on the unarmed, unidentified individuals in the boat fleeing Objective Murray. Colonel Steele's actions suggest an inability to see how different Soldiers would interpret the meaning behind these events. Some Soldiers may have inferred from these activities that aggression was the most highly prized attribute within the organization, even if it meant stepping over the line.

While he may not have been aware of Charlie Company's tallying of civilian and insurgent casualties on a Kill Board, he participated in the assault, and was, therefore, aware of his Soldiers opening fire on an empty hut. Colonel Steele had an opportunity to reign in the behavior of his subordinates then and there, but he did not. One can infer that Colonel Steele either approved of this reckless fire or he believed that it was special instance, applied against Objective Murray owing to that objective's unique rules of engagement. Either way, he did not appreciate how a Soldier's hot state and experience level affected that Soldier's ability to understand complex rules of engagement in geographically and temporally linked events. His inability to see his Soldier's perspective in this instance meant that no mitigation measures, outside strategies in Trout's parlance, were in place once Objective Murray was cleared. Girouard's repeat of this behavior later that morning was the start of a chain of events, which led to the murder of the three detainees and the death of the seventy year old man.

Colonel Steele's empathetic mindset affected the execution of mission command in many ways, but primarily the creation of shared understanding. When creating shared understanding, "establishing a culture of collaboration is difficult but necessary."⁵⁰²

Colonel Steele's mindset created deep division between the Rakkasans' and General Chiarelli's headquarters. A second aspect of shared understanding is that "potential misunderstandings" are resolved through "collaboration and dialogue."⁵⁰³ Colonel Steele's empathetic mindset made it difficult to see how his rhetoric could affect the actions of his subordinates. This may have been a factor that led to the misunderstanding surrounding the rules of engagement not being resolved. Reportedly, "in the hours before the operation, at least fourteen soldiers, of varying rank, recall receiving guidance to shoot any military-aged male on the island."⁵⁰⁴ When Girouard's platoon leader reported that he had three detainees, the Charlie Company first sergeant reportedly said, "Why do I have three fucking detainees that should have been killed?"⁵⁰⁵ It is clear from these comments that shared understanding concerning the rules of engagement had not been achieved within the Rakkasans. His Soldiers took initiative in a situation that was informed by all of the previous aggressive and questionable incidents, which had already occurred within the organization.

Colonel Steele's policies, training, and rhetoric cultivated an environment, which widened the empathy gap between the Rakkasans and other military organizations, the enemy, and the people. When this occurs, the decision to fire into a window that contained "a male, maybe a white sheet" is perfectly acceptable because it simply did not matter to the Soldier.⁵⁰⁶ The value of Iraqi life had been reduced. Paradoxically, it seems that Colonel Steele cultivated this environment where this attitude to the population was not only possible, but also encouraged out of an honest concern for the welfare of his Soldiers. The fact that Colonel Steele understood the realities of combat for the common Soldier demonstrates that the distance of the empathy gap between his Soldiers and

himself was short. Unfortunately, this understanding appears to have been achieved at the expense of everyone else.

Colonel Steele Case study Conclusion

As the preceding vignettes demonstrate, Colonel Steele's empathetic mindset resulted in both favorable and unfavorable mission outcomes. This was the result of the positive and negative influences exerted by his empathetic mindset on the execution of mission command within the Rakkasans. As a reminder, the modified Beyond People Skills Module in chapter 2 lists the positive mission impacts of understanding as being: improves judgement and decision-making, team-member development, and well-being.⁵⁰⁷

Colonel Steele's empathetic mindset both negatively and positively affected his ability to execute mission command, and this led to both favorable and unfavorable mission impacts in all three areas during his command of the Rakkasans. In the first Vignette, "Pre-deployment Speech," Colonel Steele's dehumanization of the Iraqi insurgents and population, coupled with his characterization of his own Soldiers as predators, reinforced an already aggressive attitude within the Rakkasans. His dismissal of his higher headquarters' guidance concerning detainee operations was likely rooted in an inability to take another's perspective and demonstrated an egocentric viewpoint. In the second Vignette, "Operation Iron Triangle," Colonel Steele's empathetic mindset resulted in an enemy focused approach as opposed to the reconstruction approach favored by General Chiarelli. Recall from chapter 2, that the Army Operating Concept states that "the key to a strategic win is to present the enemy with multiple dilemmas."⁵⁰⁸ An enemy focused approach, as opposed to one that balances reconstruction along with security,

does not present the enemy with multiple dilemmas. Colonel Steele's refusal to follow General Chiarelli's guidance resulted not only in strained relationships between the Rakkasans and its higher headquarters, but may have favored tactical wins at the expense of a strategic one during the Samarra campaign.

The reduced casualty figures for the Rakkasans suggest that Colonel Steele's mindset may have increased the well-being of his Soldiers. As stated previously, the net well-being of the population and follow-on units was likely negatively impacted. His empathetic mindset led to complicated rules of engagement during Operation Iron Triangle. Colonel Steele's mindset affected his judgement and decision-making by reducing his ability to see the second-and-third order effects of his directives. See figure 3 for a listing of how each Colonel Steele vignette relates to the empathy indicators and principles of mission command.

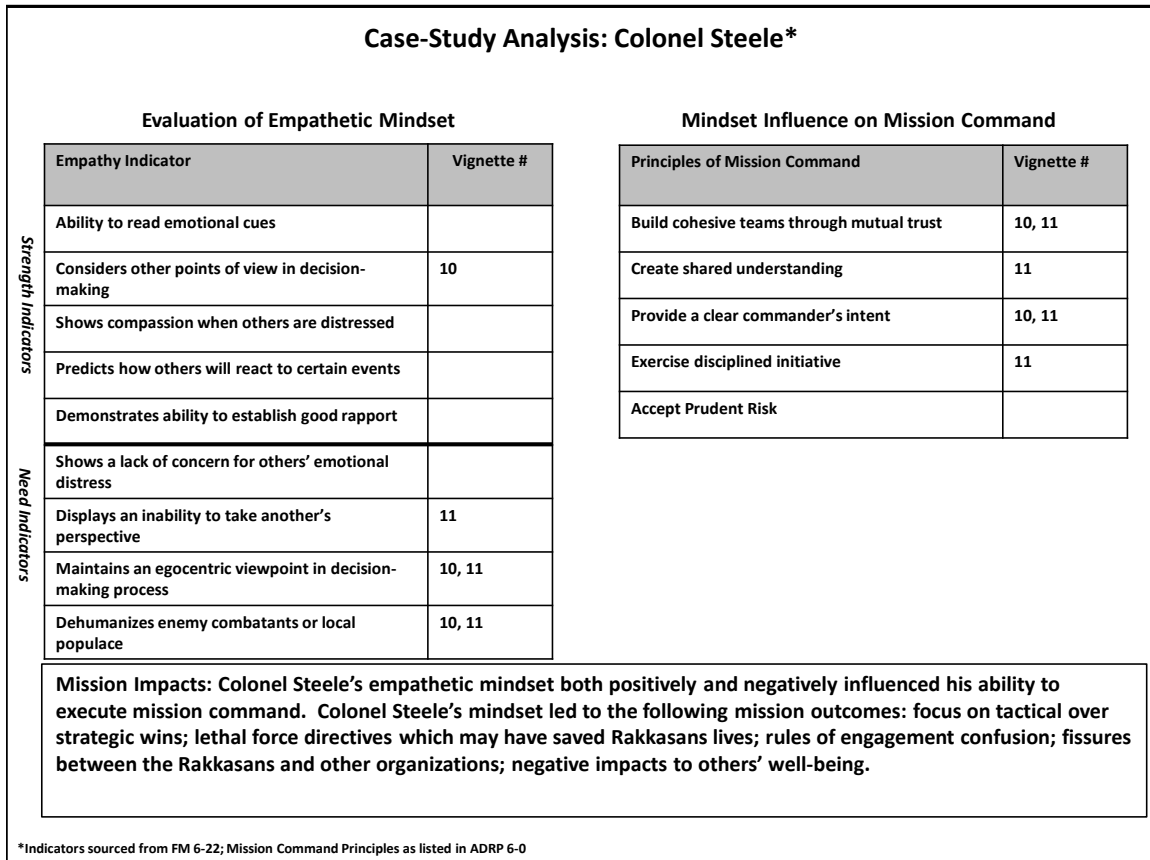


Figure 3. Colonel Steele Case Study Analysis

Source: Created by author; model adapted from US Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Leader Development* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 7-17; US Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2012), 2-1.

Conclusion

In this chapter, General Stanley McChrystal and Colonel Michael Steele were examined in order to determine how the subject's mindset influenced the execution of mission command. General Stanley McChrystal's empathetic mindset positively influenced his ability to execute mission command. As a result, General McChrystal reaped numerous positive mission outcomes. These outcomes included enhanced

judgment, decision-making, team development, and widespread increases in well-being. Colonel Steele's empathetic mindset both positively and negatively influenced his ability to execute mission command. Colonel Steele's mindset led to the following mission outcomes: lethal force directives that may have saved Rakkasans lives; rules of engagement confusion; fissures between the Rakkasans and other organizations; and negative impacts to others' well-being. General McChrystal presented multiple dilemmas to the threat in an effort to achieve strategic wins over tactical ones. The analysis of these two subjects revealed that an individual's empathetic mindset does have far and wide-ranging impacts on the execution of mission command, and as a result, the outcome of the overall mission. The next chapter will present this study's conclusions and recommendations concerning the necessity of the Army to place a greater emphasis on developing empathy.

¹ General Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2013), 392.

² Ibid., 93.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 93-94.

⁶ Ibid., 94.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 96.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 97.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 100.

¹⁴ Ibid., 91.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ US Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-1.

²⁴ For an empathy gap discussion refer Trout, 23-26, 28-32.

²⁵ US Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-2.

²⁶ McChrystal, *My Share*, 102.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 104.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 105.

³⁷ Ibid., 102-105.

³⁸ Ibid., 104.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ US Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-2.

⁴¹ McChrystal, *My Share*, 107.

⁴² Ibid., 105.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 106.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ US Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-2.

⁵⁶ McChrystal, *My Share*, 115-116.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 116.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

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⁶⁰ Ibid., 116-117.

⁶¹ Ibid., 117.

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⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 118.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 119.

⁷⁴ Ibid., “inspired territoriality,” 106.

⁷⁵ For an empathy gap discussion, refer to Trout, 23-26, 28-32. Beltway culture used by McChrystal, *My Share*, 117.

⁷⁶ US Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-2.

⁷⁷ Lowenstein, S49.

⁷⁸ Lowenstein, S49; McChrystal, *My Share*, 117.

⁷⁹ McChrystal, *My Share*, 117.

⁸⁰ Trout, 19.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² McChrystal, *My Share*, 120.

⁸³ Ibid., 120-121.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 121.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 122.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 111.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 112.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 122.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 122-123.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 123.

¹⁰² Ibid.

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¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 124.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 121.

¹¹⁰ Meadows, 32.

- ¹¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹¹² Ibid., 155-156.
- ¹¹³ McChrystal, *My Share*, 122.
- ¹¹⁴ US Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-3.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁶ McChrystal, *My Share*, 148.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid., 148-149.
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- ¹²¹ Ibid.
- ¹²² Ibid.
- ¹²³ Ibid.
- ¹²⁴ Ibid., 150.
- ¹²⁵ Ibid., 151.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid.
- ¹²⁷ Ibid.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid., 152.
- ¹²⁹ Ibid., 150.
- ¹³⁰ Ibid., 154.
- ¹³¹ Ibid.
- ¹³² Ibid.
- ¹³³ Ibid.
- ¹³⁴ Ibid.
- ¹³⁵ Ibid.

- ¹³⁶ Ibid.
- ¹³⁷ Ibid.
- ¹³⁸ Ibid.
- ¹³⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁴¹ Ibid., 154-155.
- ¹⁴² McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 163-164.
- ¹⁴³ Ibid., 164.
- ¹⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 165.
- ¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 167.
- ¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 168.
- ¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 180.
- ¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 228.
- ¹⁵¹ Ibid., 222.
- ¹⁵² Ibid., 227.
- ¹⁵³ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 228.
- ¹⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁸ McChrystal, *My Share*, 242.
- ¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 105.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 131.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 141.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 142.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 242.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 148.

¹⁶⁸ US Army, ADRP 3-0. *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-3.

¹⁶⁹ US Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-2.

¹⁷⁰ McChrystal, *My Share*, 154.

¹⁷¹ McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 228.

¹⁷² Trout, 63.

¹⁷³ McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 227.

¹⁷⁴ McChrystal, *My Share*, 154.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 222.

¹⁷⁷ McChrystal, *My Share*, 142.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 242.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 134.

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¹⁸¹ Ibid., 135.

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¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

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- ¹⁸⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 195.
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- ²⁰⁹ Ibid., 145.

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- ²¹⁶ Ibid., 224-230.
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- ²²⁰ Ibid., 233.
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- ²²³ Ibid., 135.
- ²²⁴ Ibid., 203.
- ²²⁵ Ibid., 202.
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- ²²⁷ Ibid., 144.
- ²²⁸ Ibid., 233.
- ²²⁹ Shore, *Sense of the Enemy*, 6.
- ²³⁰ Ibid., 2.
- ²³¹ Ibid., 6.
- ²³² McChrystal, *My Share*, 213.
- ²³³ Ibid., 235.
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- ²³⁵ Ibid., 259.
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- ²³⁸ Ibid.
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- ²⁴⁰ Ibid., 261.
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- ²⁴³ Ibid., 270.
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- ²⁵⁰ Ibid., 272-279.
- ²⁵¹ Ibid., 277.
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- ²⁵³ Ibid., 291, listening tour reference, 301.
- ²⁵⁴ Ibid., 295.
- ²⁵⁵ Ibid.
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²⁶⁰ Ibid., 326.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 289-290.

²⁶² Ibid., 310.

²⁶³ Ibid.

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²⁷⁵ Ibid., 329-330.

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²⁸⁸ Ibid., 322.
²⁸⁹ Ibid., 310.
²⁹⁰ Ibid., 307.
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²⁹² Ibid.
²⁹³ Ibid.
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²⁹⁵ Ibid., 369.
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²⁹⁸ Ibid., 378.
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³⁰⁶ Ibid.
³⁰⁷ Ibid.
³⁰⁸ Ibid., 380.
³⁰⁹ Ibid.

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³¹² Ibid., 254-255.

³¹³ Ibid., 255.

³¹⁴ US Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-5.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ McChrystal, *My Share*, 269.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 295.

³¹⁸ Trout, 23-26, 28-32.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ McChrystal, *My Share*, 326.

³²¹ Ibid., 322.

³²² Meadows, 106.

³²³ McChrystal, *My Share*, 317.

³²⁴ Ibid., 301.

³²⁵ Michael Hastings, "The Runaway General: The Rolling Stone Profile of Stanley McChrystal That Changed History," *Rolling Stone*, 22 June 2010, accessed 21 February 2016, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-runaway-general-20100622>.

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³²⁷ US Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-2.

³²⁸ McChrystal, *My Share*, 380.

³²⁹ Ibid., 310.

³³⁰ Ibid., 354.

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³³⁸ Ibid., 372.
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- ⁴²⁰ Ibid., 2-4.
- ⁴²¹ Khatchadourian, “Kill Company,” 50.
- ⁴²² Ibid., 49.
- ⁴²³ Ibid.
- ⁴²⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴²⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴²⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴²⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴²⁸ Ibid., 50.
- ⁴²⁹ Ibid., 49.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 46.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 50.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 53.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 54.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 55. Khatchadourian attributes this quote to Girouard.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 56.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 43.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 59.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁹⁴ US Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2006), 5-2. The goal in the initial stage of a counterinsurgency operation is to “protect the population, break the insurgents’ initiative and momentum, and set the conditions for further engagement.” It should be noted that this manual was published in 15 December 2006, months after the execution of Operation Iron Triangle.

⁴⁹⁵ Khatchadourian, “Kill Company,” 58.

⁴⁹⁶ Trout, 5.

⁴⁹⁷ Meadows, 108.

⁴⁹⁸ Khatchadourian, “Kill Company,” 45.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁰¹ Steele.

⁵⁰² US Army, ADRP 6-0, 2-2.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Khatchadourian, “Kill Company,” 50.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ US Army, “Beyond People Skills: Leveraging Your Understanding of Others, Characteristics, Actions, Impacts, Flowcharts” MSAF 360, accessed 5 December 2015, <https://msaf1.army.mil/IMITraining/Lesson25/html/UnderstandingOthersJobAid.pdf>.

⁵⁰⁸ US Army, TP 525-3-1, iii.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many times the question has been asked whether Patton possessed an intuition—a sixth sense or whatever—which contributed to the exploits of his commands and to his ability to catch his enemy unaware. If one can call anticipation of enemy reactions based on a lifetime of professional training and on thinking and application “intuition,” he had it.¹

— BG Oscar W. Koch, *G-2: Intelligence for Patton*

The Army should emphasize developing empathy in order to enhance the execution of mission command to better enable Army leaders to win in a future complex OE. The preceding case studies demonstrated that an individual’s empathetic mindset significantly influences the execution of mission command within an organization. An individual with a strong empathetic mindset is more likely to obtain positive mission outcomes as a result of improved judgement, decision-making, team building, and shared understanding. The purpose of this chapter is to present the Empathy in a Complex World flowchart supporting this conclusion and to make recommendations for further study.

Empathy in a Complex World

The conclusion of this study is to operate successfully within the complex future human domain, the Army must develop its leaders’ capacity for empathy in order to enhance their ability to execute mission command, present adversaries with multiple dilemmas, and achieve strategic outcomes instead of tactical victories. This conclusion is depicted in the box at the top of the Empathy in a Complex World flowchart in figure 4.

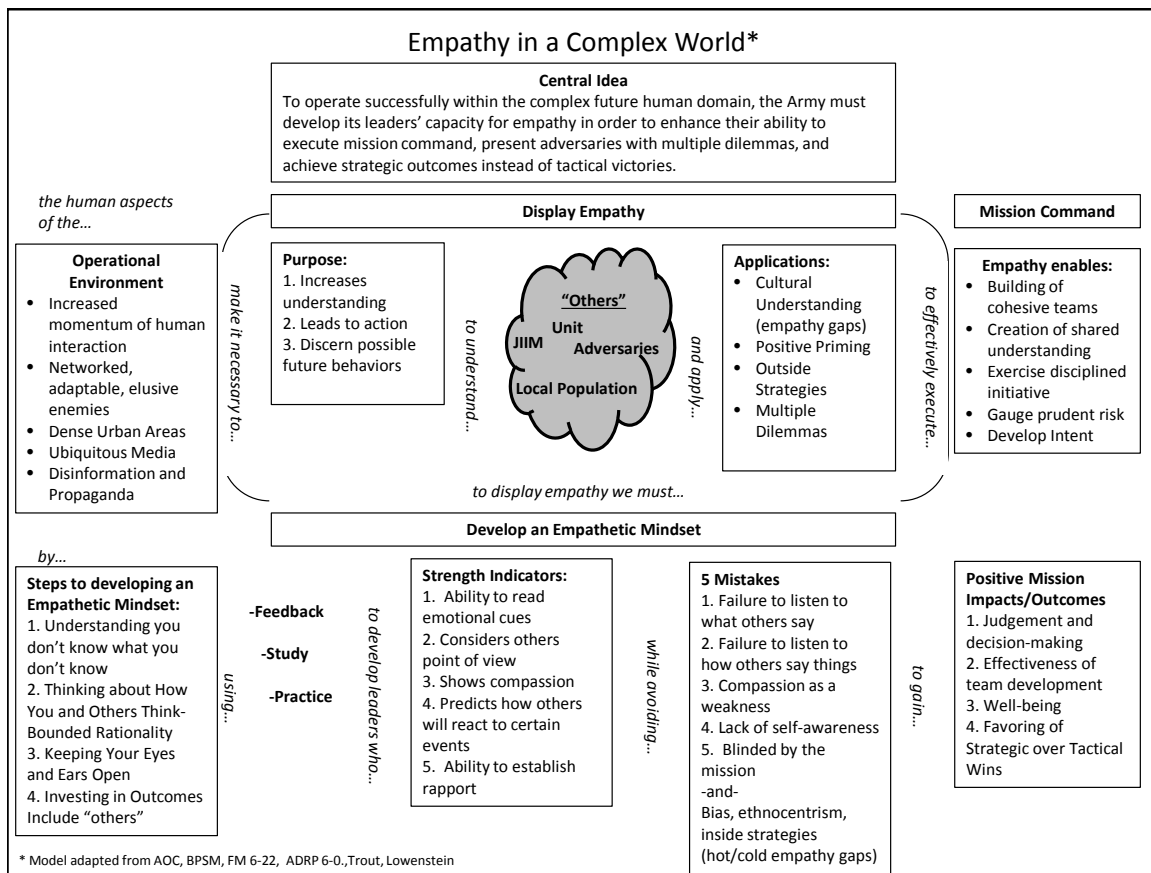


Figure 4. Empathy in a Complex World

Source: Created by author, model adapted from US Army, US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet (TP) 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept (AOC): Win in a Complex World* (Fort Eustis, VA: Department of the Army, 2014), iii-12; US Army, “Beyond People Skills: Leveraging Your Understanding of Others Overview,” MSAF 360, accessed 5 December 2015, <http://msaf.army.mil/LeadOn.aspx>; US Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Leader Development* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 6-2, 7-17; US Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2012), 2-1; J. D. Trout, *Why Empathy Matters: the Science and Psychology of Better Judgment* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 23; George Lowenstein, “Hot-Cold Empathy Gaps and Medical Decision Making,” *Health Psychology* 24, no. 4 (2005): S49.

The first row in the flowchart describes the “who, why, and what” behind the concept of empathy. The box on the left of the flowchart’s first row lists the human

aspects of the anticipated OE. The human aspects of the future OE make empathy necessary in order to increase understanding, which informs action, and to discern the possible future behaviors of others. As defined in FM 6-22 in chapter 2, the term “others,” portrayed in the cloud in the center row, encompasses not just subordinates, but any person or groups that a leader seeks to understand.² A leader applies their empathetic insights in order to reduce empathy gaps, create positive priming environmental cues, design outside strategies, and present the multiple dilemmas most likely to lead to an enemy’s defeat. These applications enhance the execution of mission command because empathy: improves the building of cohesive teams; enables the creation of shared understanding; allows accurate gauging of risk; aids in the development of an intent, which enables disciplined initiative.

The second row answers how an empathetic mindset is developed, its characteristics, and its importance. The box on the left in the flowchart’s second row, lists the four steps from the Beyond People Skills: Leveraging Your Understanding of Others Module, first discussed in chapter 2. The General McChrystal case study provides examples of the application of these steps in real world military situations. The first step to developing an empathetic mindset according to the BPSM is that a leader must understand that you don’t know what you don’t know.³ This study suggests that viewing human-decision making through the concept of bounded rationality can significantly improve a person’s empathetic understanding. In Vignette 8, “Afghanistan Initiatives,” General McChrystal used a bounded rationality like frame when viewing the Afghans. Using this frame enabled him and his subordinates to gain greater insight into how the

local population saw themselves in relation to the Afghan Government, the insurgents, and coalition forces.

The next step to building an empathetic mindset according to the BPSM is thinking about how you and others think.⁴ In Vignette 8, General McChrystal undertook an Afghanistan wide listening tour to address his incomplete understanding of the population and his own forces. General McChrystal used a process similar to the Seven Step Ladder of Conclusion model shown in table 9 during the tour, which greatly informed his decision-making and future actions. The third step to building an empathetic mindset is keeping your eyes and ears open.⁵ Vignette 6, “Networked,” provides an excellent example of how the daily Operations and Intelligence Brief allowed General McChrystal to pay attention to what was being said in his organization. The final step is investing in outcomes.⁶ This step involves asking questions to determine how to most effectively work with other people. It can be modified so that the same questions can be asked of all others, not just a coworker or subordinate. In Vignette 2, “Knowing the Enemy,” General McChrystal, considered a series of questions in his mind to better understand the rocket-propelled-gunner that clipped a helicopter traveling behind his own. This simple mental exercise helped him to understand the insurgency at that point in time in Iraq.

The steps to developing an empathetic mind can be augmented with FM 6-22’s Feedback Study, Practice Model (FSPM) shown in table 6. The guidance listed in the FSPM is an inside strategy designed to assist an individual’s development of the strength indicators while avoiding the five mistakes listed in the center of the second row found in

the BPSM. Ultimately, the purpose of a military leader developing empathy is to gain the positive mission impacts and outcomes listed at the end of the second row.

A strong empathetic mindset increases the likelihood that a leader is able to see the second-and-third order effects of their actions or possible future actions in a human system. The ability to contemplate these effects results in a leader capable of presenting the enemy with multiple dilemmas more likely to lead to their defeat. As stated in the Army Operating Concept, this is the “key to a Strategic Win.”⁷ Empathy impacts mission outcomes as a result of improved judgement and decision-making, enhanced team development, and the maximization of the well-being within one’s own organization and others as well.

The Empathy in a Complex World flowchart is a complete representation of this study’s findings. The analysis in chapter 4 supports the flowchart’s assertions and conclusion. The General McChrystal Case study demonstrated the benefits of a strong empathetic mindset. His empathetic mindset developed during his command of Task Force 714 and Afghanistan coalition forces as he built relationships. The Colonel Steele case study demonstrates an empathetic mindset seemingly frozen - one that appeared to change little from the time of his pre-deployment speech to the execution of Operation Iron Triangle. His case study provides a characterization of a leader whose concern for his own troops prevented him from understanding those around him.

In the end, even General McChrystal’s strong empathetic mindset failed to prevent the empathy gap between himself and his own civilian leaders from growing. While this study will not make the claim that a greater Army emphasis on developing empathy would have prevented General McChrystal’s resignation, or caused Colonel

Steele to seek a more balanced counterinsurgency approach, it does support the many benefits of empathy on mission outcomes. Given empathy's role in mission command and the anticipated future OE, greater knowledge and understanding of empathy would no doubt provide many Army leaders a significant range of benefits. The lack of detailed discussion concerning empathy in doctrine and its narrow focus on leader-subordinate relationships indicate that the concept of empathy and its impacts on mission command is not fully appreciated within the military. This is further evidenced by the fact that critical concepts relating to empathy detailed in civilian literature, such as pattern breaks, inside and outside strategies, hot and cold empathy gaps, and bounded rationality are not addressed in doctrine. This, despite the fact, that these concepts are critical tools to understanding issues and opportunities so common to military operations.

Recommendations

A greater emphasis on empathy development by the Army could enhance the understanding of empathy and empathy related concepts, which are necessary for success in the anticipated future OE. This study has demonstrated that a leader's empathetic mindset influences mission command while also showing that doctrine is lagging behind civilian literature. To address these shortfalls and to further increase the understanding of empathy, this study recommends three possible areas for further inquiry.

The first recommendation for further inquiry is to determine how best to emphasize the current, or if necessary a modified version, Army empathy development strategy. After the study of Trout's concept of inside and outside strategies, one questions the efficacy of the FSPM and the BPSM. As noted in chapter 2, inside strategies like these ignore powerful human biases that often cause them to fail. Further inquiry could

explore the possibility of the Army instituting outside strategies to improve empathy development instead of relying on personnel initiative. Also recall that the display empathy Feedback, Study, Practice model is just one of over fifty such models in FM 6-22. Future inquiry could address how to emphasize empathy development and if a strong empathetic mindset serves as a catalyst for the development of other desirable attributes. Finally, future inquiry could determine how leaders can better assess empathy strength and need indicators in their own subordinates. This research could include a discussion of empathy's relation to leader attributes listed in Army evaluation reports.

The second recommendation for further inquiry is to determine if the doctrinal concepts linked to empathy in this study need modification. This study determined that the discussion of empathy in doctrine is narrowly focused on the leader-subordinate relationship. Further inquiry would determine how the mission command philosophy and the FM 6-22 empathy definition and development strategy could be modified in order to include those concepts found in civilian literature. Further inquiry could determine how doctrine might incorporate pattern breaks in order to better craft strategic multiple dilemmas. Additional research may also determine the best locations in doctrine to discuss hot and cold empathy gaps, cultural empathy, and outside strategies.

Finally, future inquiry can be made to determine if closing the empathy gap between an individual and a targeted population puts them at risk for increasing the empathy gap with others. This phenomenon, encountered in Vignette 9, "Assessment and Resignation," may explain General McChrystal's difficulty in empathizing with his political leaders as he developed his ability to empathize with the Afghans and his own forces. This phenomenon may also explain Colonel's Steele's reluctance to adopt

counterinsurgency practices that may have increased the perceived differences between himself and his Soldiers.

Conclusion

A greater Army emphasis on developing empathy would better enable Army leaders to win in a future complex world. A leader's empathetic mindset significantly influences how that person executes mission command and the likelihood of them achieving a strategic win. An ability to empathize will be of critical importance in the complex human terrain of the future OE. The current Army development strategy is narrowly focused on the leader-subordinate relationship and does not incorporate the advances in the area of empathy found in civilian literature. The Empathy in a Complex World model is a synthesis of the civilian and military thought as it currently stands. Further inquiry is necessary to determine if a new empathy development strategy is required, and how best to incorporate empathy and its related concepts into doctrine. The study of empathy, and its relation to military operations, is of vital importance. A greater emphasis on developing empathy is an important step that could be taken towards solving the problem of how to win in a complex world.

¹ Brig. Gen. Oscar W. Koch and Robert G. Hayes, *G-2: Intelligence for Patton* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 1999), 151. Oscar Koch served as General George Patton's intelligence officer during World War II.

² US Army, FM 6-22, 7-16.

³ US Army, "Beyond People Skills: Leveraging Your Understanding of Other, Understanding Others: Characteristics, Actions, Impacts, Flowcharts," MSAF 360, accessed 5 December 2015, <https://msaf1.army.mil/IMITraining/Lesson25/html/UnderstandingOthersJobAid.pdf>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ US Army, TP 525-3-1, iii.

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